Maya Pilgrimage to Ritual Landscapes

Insights from Archaeology, History, and Ethnography

JOEL W. PALKA

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH: Maya ritual cliff at Lake Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico
Courtesy of Joel W. Palka

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For my wife, Nilda, and kids, Elena, Diana, and Julian,
who made this work possible.

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CHAPTER ONE

Ritual Landscapes, Pilgrimage, and Cultures in the Southern Maya Region

> When the people [male ritual leaders] have finished their promises [on the San Antonio Mountain] they move to the cave of "El Señor," where it is said that they conclude their petitions in this sacred place. The interior of this cave has a stone image that represents him. From this image water is born that they say is blessed. With their drums and their flutes and red banners, the leaders initiate their return [to the church].
>
> —Ch'ol Maya narrative, José L. Pérez Chacón, *Los Choles de Tila y su mundo*, 1993, 214–15

As we cleared the brush obscuring the stone walls of an ancient Maya temple on a mountain at Lake Mensabak in Chiapas, Mexico, our Lacandon Maya collaborator shouted that he had discovered an old Lacandon incense burner nestled between some slumped blocks (fig. 1.1). He then told a story about how local Lacandon men, including his father, had ascended the mountain to leave the offering. The rituals they performed consisted of curing ceremonies for family members back in the village. His male relatives would travel to this shrine to provide food offerings and burn incense for the resident gods (*k'uh* or *k'ul*) in ceramic god pots (*u lakil k'ul/k'ur*) to request their help in healing the sick. The Lacandon men would take small stones from the temple back to their villages to animate their god pots and leave incense burners as payments for the gods' help and to compensate them for removing the stones. He finished his story by stating that the men visited similar homes of the gods in caves and mountains around the lake to ask for rain.

Figure 1.1. Lacandon Maya ceramic incense burner placed in the stone-block wall of a Preclassic Maya temple on the summit of Mirador Mountain, Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico.

Maya pilgrimages to ritual landscapes have a long history at Lake Mensabak. As it turns out, the stone-block temple visited by the Lacandon men rests on the summit of a mountain on an island (fig. 1.2). Furthermore, the ruined temple used by the Lacandon for ritual purposes was constructed by the Preclassic Maya around A.D. 200. This building sits in front of a dramatic vertical cave shaft, and it faces a series of cave and boulder shrines on the north slope of the mountain. What is more impressive is that this temple is found in a rectangular plaza that was meticulously leveled on the summit by ancient Maya architects. The cave shrines, plaza, and temple complex were visited by large numbers of Maya pilgrims arriving by canoe who ascended the hill on monumental terraces. Ancient pilgrimage sites like this one—as well as innumerable shrines at springs, on islands, near boulders, and in other ritual landscapes—can be found throughout the Maya region and Mesoamerica (Broda et al. 2009; Carrasco and Sessions, eds. 2007; Crumrine and Morinis 1991; Hammond and Bobo 1994; Kubler 1984; Martínez Marín 1972; Vogt 1981).

Maya ritual landscapes and pilgrimage have retained their social, religious, and political importance for Maya people for thousands of years, as cave

Figure 1.2. Island in a ritual lake with the pyramidal Mirador Mountain and red-stained limestone cliff, Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico (photograph by Sebastián Salgado Flores).

archaeology has demonstrated (Brady 2000; Prufer and Brady 2005; Stone 1995). In the colonial period, the continued occurrence of native Maya rites far from the Catholic churches weighed heavily on the minds of Spanish priests and officials. They often complained about the survival of Maya pagan rituals at shrines in caves, in forests, and on mountains where the Mayas' so-called idols or god images were kept (Chuchiak 2009; Clendinnen 1987; Stone 1932; Ximénez 1999). The shrines were maintained by Maya religious specialists for communication with spiritual essences and to maintain cosmic balance during the tumultuous times of the Spanish colonial period. These rites were not innovations, but the continuation of ancient practices. The need to preserve both Maya images in shrines and the freedom to travel to and worship at them provoked native rebellions in Chiapas following the Spanish conquest. The Tzeltal Maya revolt in 1712, for instance, ignited after Spanish priests curtailed pilgrimages to and rituals at a recently established shrine on a hill near Cancuc (Bricker 1981:59–69; Gosner 1992:122–23). A young Maya woman claimed to have had a vision of the Virgin Mary in the forest near the mountains. At this special place, the apparition told the Tzeltal woman that she would help the

indigenous people if they would construct a shrine dedicated to her. Subsequently, Maya male religious and political leaders from Cancuc declared themselves head priests and attempted to break away from Spanish rule to set up their own religious order and political organization. Meanwhile, the shrine was visited by large numbers of Maya pilgrims from surrounding areas who came to ask the Virgin for favors and cures as well as to listen to her messages. The Spanish retaliated by hunting down the Maya leaders, abolishing the ceremonies, and destroying the shrine.

Descriptions of Maya pilgrimages to shrines in the ritual landscape frequently occur in contemporary ethnographic writing about Chiapas. Anthropologists studying the Lacandon Maya at the turn of the twentieth century remarked upon the Mayas' journeys to caves and cliffs in the forest to undertake rituals (Soustelle 1961; Soustelle 1970:33; Tozzer 1907). Later in the twentieth century, the study of Maya pilgrimages to ritual landscapes became a cornerstone of anthropological and archaeological work in Chiapas (Vogt 1969, 1981). These investigations heralded the current interest in Maya shrines at significant geographical features, particularly caves and mountains (Bassie Sweet 1996, 2008; Brady and Prufer 2005; Brown 2005). Research questions regarding Maya pilgrimage to ritual landscapes and its long history can be examined within the anthropology and archaeology of native religion in Mesoamerica (Benson 1981; López Austin and López Luján 2009; Monaghan 1995; Sandstrom 2005). For instance, why has Maya pilgrimage to ritual landscapes prevailed from the distant past to the present? What are the functions of Maya pilgrimage, and why have journeys to ritual landscapes been important in Maya religion? How can we recognize Maya pilgrimage to ritual landscapes in the archaeological and ethnographic records? How does Maya behavior compare to other pilgrimage practices around the world? In this book, I will address these questions through cross-cultural comparisons based in archaeology, ethnohistory, and ethnography, and I will also consider the importance of Maya ritual landscapes and pilgrimage for native social identity and community.

Before I discuss the central elements of Maya pilgrimage to landscape shrines, I would like to point out that I examine them in a Mesoamerican cultural context. Also, I consider pilgrimage in Maya state- and village-level societies from its development thousands of years ago to the present. Like McCorriston (2011), I am interested in pilgrimage as a metastructure, or an element of social life that is so integral to a cultural core that it transcends political and temporal parameters. Like certain aspects of social organization,

subsistence, and religion in both ancient Maya states and modern villages, Maya pilgrimage to ritual landscapes has survived over the centuries and can be studied through material remains and ethnographies. Since pilgrimage to ritual landscapes is important around the globe, I am interested in exploring cross-cultural similarities. I concentrate on the Southern Maya Region, or Chiapas and adjacent areas in Guatemala, because of my research interests and the wealth of information found there.

Three main points regarding Maya culture are important for our consideration of Maya ritual landscapes and pilgrimage. The study of Maya pilgrimage must take into account the intersection of ritual landscapes and religion in Mesoamerica. Impressive landscape features are the "communicating places" or abodes of deities who can act benevolently or malevolently toward humans. The essences responsible for providing rain, food, health, and life itself are concentrated in ritual landscapes, and these essences must be visited and propitiated for their life-giving properties to be released. These places are separated from human settlements because they are potentially dangerous. This separation is an important component of beliefs in human versus nonhuman space and the achievement of pilgrims' goals, which include heightened ritual experiences, contact with spiritual forces, and subsequent transformation. But rather than a few major pilgrimage centers, as seen elsewhere in the world, Mesoamerica has countless pilgrimage shrines since each community has places to contact deities and ancestors. Mesoamerican people manifest a "pilgrimage culture" in which visits to shrines are a part of everyday life. Furthermore, pilgrimages to ritual landscapes in Mesoamerica are related to the covenants between indigenous people and spiritual forces, thus they are more obligatory than voluntary. In this regard, Mesoamerican and, in particular, Maya pilgrimage revolves around the maintenance of cosmic order and the collective good. Rites at the shrines frequently concern fertility (human and agricultural), curing the sick, and the control of rainfall.

Pilgrimages in this culture area are at times carried out during annual festivals, and hence pilgrimages undertaken on a regular basis are often in tune with ritual calendars. However, pilgrimages are additionally carried out in times of crisis or periods of imbalance, including during droughts, conflicts, and when the need for curing arises. Moreover, people perform pilgrimages to give thanks to spiritual forces for providing necessities and good health. Mesoamerican and Maya pilgrimage to ritual landscapes also has sociopolitical aspects centering on identity, political power, and economics. Pilgrimage

is important to ideas about community origins and social identity and is connected with notions about territory. Elites and adult male religious specialists largely manage pilgrimages because they run community politics, economies, and agriculture. They are more "ritually pure" than women and younger nonspecialists. Also, pilgrimage has economic consequences since it involves trade, markets, feasting, temporary housing, and the production of things related to ritual journeys, such as offerings given at the shrines. Importantly, elites and male religious specialists organize economic activities associated with pilgrimage and benefit from the control over the producers, traders, and flow of goods. Hence, political and religious leaders strive to establish pilgrimage shrines in the ritual landscapes of their territories.

PLACE AND MAYA RITUAL LANDSCAPES

Maya, as well as other Mesoamerican peoples, describe the ritual landscapes that affect human perceptions and actions as being the homes of the gods. They visit the gods to give them offerings for rain, good harvests, and health or to pay for something they want or have received, among other reasons. Through ritual landscapes Maya religious specialists contact deities, spiritual essences, and ancestors to petition them for favors and provide these forces with the things they need, such as food, social interaction, and entertainment. Since ritual landscapes are linked to gods, ancestors, and native histories and mythologies, these places figure prominently in narratives about social identity and territory. Importantly, ritual landscapes or homes of spiritual forces are located away from human settlements, thus people must journey to visit them. Therefore, we must examine the close relationship between ritual landscapes and pilgrimage.

In this chapter I provide background information on both ritual landscapes and pilgrimage, introduce the Maya cultures of the study area, and discuss the historical connections between them. In the rest of the book I examine case studies of Maya ritual landscapes and pilgrimage and show how these places and practices were important for Maya societies over time. Ritual landscapes have always been the destinations of Maya and Mesoamerican pilgrims, and thus we must examine these places and pilgrimage together. However, a great deal of the academic literature focuses on either ritual landscapes or pilgrimage, while mentioning the other only in passing. For example, some archaeological studies of ancient Maya caves

refer to pilgrimages in a cursory manner (Bassie-Sweet 1996; Brady and Sears 2000; Prufer and Brady 2005; Stone 1995). Many publications have not offered detailed explanations of the importance of pilgrimage to ritual landscapes in a Mesoamerican context. Authors recognize the prevalence of Maya pilgrimage to ritual landscapes and its centrality for the study of Maya religion and society, but investigations of pilgrimage in Maya culture history and Mesoamerica in general have not been widely pursued in primary research (but see Adams and Brady 1994; Broda 2009; Crumrine and Morinis 1991; Freidel 1981; Good Eshelman 2009; Kubler 1984; Martínez Marín 1972; Patel 2009; Sandstrom 2005; Vogt 1969).

Past examinations of Maya pilgrimages have described the ritual landscapes to which Maya people journeyed, such as mountains, caves, springs, and islands, but rarely have these works discussed the functions of pilgrimage in society and religion. Moreover, the myriad sites and diachronic evidence for pilgrimage in the Maya area and Mesoamerica indicate that the topics covered in this book are important. It is intriguing that investigators have not given pilgrimage in Mesoamerica adequate consideration in a comparative anthropological analysis. While intensive studies of landscapes predominate (Ashmore and Knapp 1999; Brady and Prufer 2005; Koontz et al. 2001; Staller 2008), few treatments of pilgrimage have appeared in book form, especially in archaeology (but see Freidel and Sabloff 1984; Rodríguez-Shadow and Shadow 2000; Sabloff and Rathje 1975).

To address these issues, my research also builds on studies of place and its importance in pilgrimage behavior. I am interested in the intersections of religious ideology, cultural landscapes, and human settlements (Ashmore and Knapp 1999). The literature on pilgrimage stresses the presence of outstanding geographical features as pilgrimage destinations, including caves, mountains, islands, and lakes (fig. 1.3). Because of their unique physical features and material indicators of ritual, such as shrines, offerings, and burials, these places accumulate "spiritual magnetism." Spiritual forces are present at such ritual places, and people must make pilgrimages to engage them at their homes for religious and practical purposes, such as the reinforcement of identity and healing of the sick (fig. 1.4). Previous works have also pointed out that ritual landscapes are social constructs and that people experience significant places through their senses and the movements of their bodies (Tilley 2008). Furthermore, place has been seen as central to social memory, experience, and identity, which are transmitted through stories, visits, and rituals (Basso 1996).

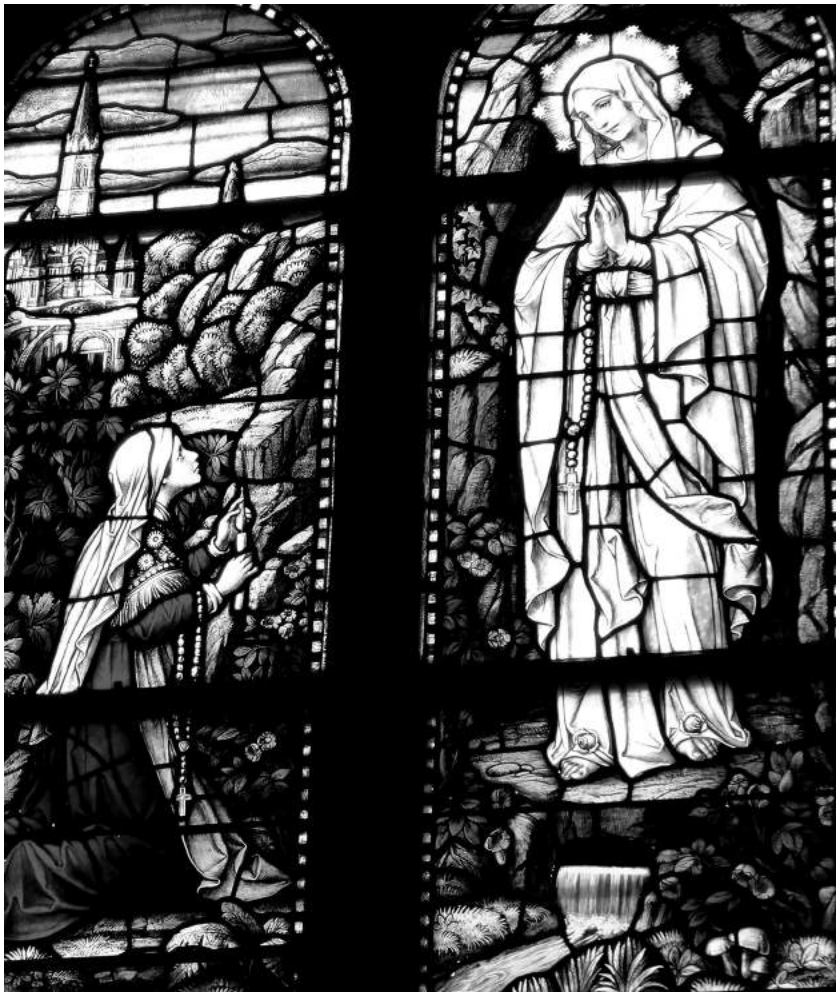

Figure 1.3. Stained glass in Ascension Church, Oak Park, Illinois, showing the pilgrimage shrine of Lourdes and communication with spiritual forces at ritual landscapes in Christian iconography. Note the shrine near a hill with boulders, cave, and a spring.

A key perspective of this book is that ritual landscapes are "places of interaction": significant places are not only constructed based on their unique features and connection to memories and identity, they are created through people's ceremonies in the landscape (Molesky-Poz 2006). People not only perceive and experience the landscape, but impressive landscapes themselves invite human interaction and influence people's responses to

Figure 1.4 Nazca ceramic pilgrimage scene with traveling figures playing music and carrying offerings and provisions (Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia de Perú).

place and how they are utilized (Olsen 2010). Significant places attract humans for ritual purposes, and people build connections to the landscape through ritual. Specific places maintained for ritual are subsequently connected to histories, memories, and identities. The unusual places that draw human interaction are the ones I am interested in: mountains, cliffs, boulders, caves, ruins, bodies of water, and islands, which have always been important to Mesoamerican cultures. These places can be identified in the archaeological record due to their noticeable features and associated remains of ritual, such as terraces, platforms, shrines, altars, incense burners, offering bowls, human burials, and rock art, which were created by ritual specialists and pilgrims to facilitate communication with spiritual forces, appease these forces, and reflect their religious values. Such materials also signaled the social identity of the people who visited the shrine and helped them to mark their territory.

Ritual landscapes are thus unique, culturally significant geographical features that Maya people—largely elites, male religious specialists, and household heads—selected as places for pilgrimage. These ritual landscapes tend to be impressive and to contain multiple natural features, such as mountains with caves, cliffs with springs, or boulders with rock art near streams. While these places were selected by members of a society and are historically important, their impact on the human senses—particularly sight, touch, and hearing, in short, their phenomenological importance—cannot be stressed enough.

Although the term *sacred landscapes* is common in the literature, I revert to the concept of "ritual landscapes" (Anschuetz et al. 2001; Moore 2004) and "communicating places," following research that challenges the idea of landscapes as being sacred to indigenous Mesoamerican people (Astor-Aguilera 2010; Monaghan 2000). Landscapes are not hallowed ground or worshiped in a Western sense; they are connected with indigenous histories, spiritual essences, rituals, and identities. *Ritual landscapes* may also be a slippery label, but it is common in the literature, more so than "communicating places" or "landscapes of human-spiritual interaction," which closely describe the Mesoamerican case. It is also more accurate and convenient than the term *significant place*, which is found in pilgrimage studies. Native Mesoamericans refer to these places in descriptive terms or as homes of gods, such as "Round Mountain" or "Cave of the Earth God." As we will see, *pilgrimage* itself may not be the best word to describe ritual journeys in Mesoamerica. Needless to say, I do not wish to get bogged down in a discussion of definitions and terminology, and the concepts I have chosen to frame my discussion of these topics will become clear as we proceed.

MAYA PILGRIMAGE AND COLLECTIVE BENEFIT

In this study, I see pilgrimage as a central aspect of Maya religion, ritual, and culture (fig. 1.5). We will look at pilgrimage through time and in state versus nonstate societies, in both small and large social groups, and in elite versus non-elite social and material contexts. For our purposes, the term *pilgrimage* essentially refers to a journey to one or more ritual landscapes to leave offerings for and interact with spiritual essences residing there in order to fulfill obligations relating to the maintenance of world balance and social identity. Pilgrimages over short distances in Mesoamerica are carried out for purposes

of healing, delineating boundaries, and maintaining cosmic balance. Pilgrims cover longer distances when they have a problem of greater significance or urgency, like a request for rain during a drought or the periodic need to reinforce group identity. Mesoamerican pilgrims attain various individually focused social, economic, and religious goals, as in other parts of the world, yet pilgrimages are also seen as benefitting others, whether a pilgrim petitions for abundant crops or for divine assistance to cure sick family members. From an emic viewpoint, the journeys to Maya ritual landscapes are seen as "visits," "arrivals," "travels," and "seeing" rather than what Europeans call pilgrimage and *peregrinación*, but the actions and functions are essentially the same. Therefore, I follow the use of the term *pilgrimage*, as established in the literature, to describe the journeys of Maya people who leave their homes to visit ritual landscapes to communicate with spiritual forces through offerings and ceremonies then return to their homes when their religious goals have been achieved. Furthermore, native Mesoamericans recognize that gods and ancestors make pilgrimages just like people do, thus humans perpetuate the gods' actions and maintain the proper interactions with important spiritual essences, tutelary deities, and ancestors (Hamman 2002).

Maya and Mesoamerican societies have what can be referred to as a pilgrimage culture. Pilgrimage is a part of daily life, and it deals with everyday concerns, such as the maintenance of food sources and the continuation of life (Kubler 1984). For instance, frequent pilgrimages to ritual mountains to petition the deities and pay them offerings for rain, crop health, and good harvests are just as necessary for successful farming as planting seeds and weeding. Patron gods residing in important landscape features also protect Maya communities (Montejo 2001:xv), which explains why redoubts were constructed on certain hilltops—both the walls and deities there shielded people from attackers. These deities are nourished and their protection of humans acknowledged through Mayas' pilgrimages to their landscape abodes to leave them offerings. However, pilgrimage is not undertaken solely for personal religious purposes, individual healing, adherence to religious dogma, community cohesion, or random reasons, as seen in other world religions, although some of these aspects are part of Maya and Mesoamerican pilgrimages. The movements of people symbolize the travels of deities and celestial bodies, and pilgrimage is important for maintaining cosmic balance and world order (Martínez Marín 1972). Thus, pilgrimage is collectively beneficial, for both humans and spiritual essences. Mesoamerican pilgrimages may also take place at specific times according to religious calendars or market or agricultural cycles (Tedlock

Figure 1.5. Pilgrimage to a Spanish church on an ancient Maya temple, Chichicastenango, Guatemala. Note the burning incense and offerings at the altar on the temple steps (lower left).

2010). Furthermore, Mesoamerican pilgrimage has political and economic benefits. Trade and markets occur at pilgrimage sites, and elites and male religious specialists and household heads tend to manage both pilgrimages and shrines, which leads to political power and economic gain.

Maya and Mesoamerican pilgrimage, in comparison to pilgrimage traditions elsewhere, does not focus on a few primary ritual sites (Morinis 1992; Stoddard and Morinis 1997; Tedlock 2010; Turner and Turner 1978). A potentially infinite number of sites exist in the Mesoamerican landscape where people communicate with spiritual beings. The ritual landscape that houses these divine forces has many access points, what I call "communicating places," where people make contact with them, much like the multiple doors and windows of a house. Spiritual forces also penetrate the physical universe, allowing Maya people to interact with them at many geographically significant places in the landscape or at altars and temples created for communication. Maya pilgrimage operates within the covenants that Mesoamerican societies have with spiritual or nonhuman forces (Astor-Aguilera 2010; Monaghan 1995). These covenants are described as constant obligations to spiritual forces by Maya and Mesoamerican peoples, but this continuous interaction is for the mutual benefit of all. Maya people must make numerous pilgrimages to the homes of their gods and ancestors to provide offerings to maintain the covenants with them. The right amounts of rain, abundant food supplies, and human health and fertility depend on the renewal of the covenants, and at the homes of the gods in the ritual landscapes away from human settlements, the offerings and petitions are more efficacious. Visits to their houses facilitate communication and are more effective since the things people need are found there. Pilgrimages to ritual landscapes have also been viewed as pleasing to the spiritual forces, for they receive food, drink, music, and prayer, which help sustain them (Girard 1995). Therefore, Maya and Mesoamerican pilgrimages are not singular religious opportunities, as in other cultures, but are part of the everyday tasks of keeping the covenants and balance with spiritual essences.

Based on the available archaeological and ethnographic information, I argue that Maya journeys to ritual landscapes, like pilgrimages elsewhere, also relate to native social identity, economic prosperity, territory, and life crises and other stresses. For instance, Mesoamerican elites, including male religious specialists, visit pilgrimage shrines in their roles as mediators with spiritual forces to preserve order and economic prosperity. The shrines, too, are associated with particular communities, group identities, and boundaries, and a chronological perspective shows that past ritual activity picked up at pilgrimage shrines during episodes of social or environmental difficulties, such as warfare and droughts. The proliferation of ceremonial sites in Mesoamerica and visits to them have had significant social, political, religious, and economic

benefits. The numerous investigations of anthropologists and archaeologists in the Southern Maya Region over the last one hundred years have generated copious amounts of data demonstrating the importance of native pilgrimage to ritual landscapes and the maintenance of the covenants between humans and spiritual forces over a long time.

A study of these combined components of the Maya pilgrimage metastructure from Preclassic to modern times, or two thousand years, is long overdue (fig. 1.6). Through the perspective of the *longue durée* we can study the development and common behavioral aspects of Maya pilgrimage to ritual landscapes in the Southern Maya Region. The examples of ritual landscapes in this book and their importance for Maya pilgrimage demonstrate the continuation of elements of the Maya religious metastructure. In the following sections, we will explore the cultural and historical connections between Maya peoples in the study area to better understand the topics of ritual landscapes and pilgrimage as seen in the archaeological, historical, and ethnographic records analyzed in the rest of the volume.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF THE SOUTHERN MAYA LOWLANDS

The *Southern Maya Region* is adopted in this book as a label for the lowland area bounded by the upper Usumacinta River in lowland Chiapas, Mexico, and central Petén, Guatemala; the Lacantun River in the southern limit of lowland Chiapas; and the Pasión River in southern Petén (figs. 1.7 and 1.8). It also includes the valleys, rivers, and lakes to the west of the Usumacinta River in northeastern Chiapas from Lake Miramar to Lake Catazaja. The study area also includes central to western Petén. This region, or a large portion of it, has alternatively been called the southwestern Maya lowlands and the Chan Maya region in central-west Petén and northeast Chiapas (Thompson 1977). Additionally, the area was divided into the Spanish provinces of El Próspero, Lacandon, Acala, and Tequepan Pochutla (Vos 1988a:215, 54–57). I also draw on ethnographic information from the lowlands and the adjacent Maya highlands in Chiapas and Guatemala, whose peoples had cultural affinities with the Maya in the lowlands. However, the archaeological focus here is on the Southern Maya Region.

The prehistoric cultures described in this book belong to the Preclassic, Classic, and Postclassic periods:

Figure 1.6. Lacandon Maya youth visiting the Preclassic Maya temple on the summit of Mirador Mountain, Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico.

Pre-Columbian Periods

1. Preclassic (2000 B.C.–A.D. 300): Early, 2000–1000 B.C.; Middle, 1000–400 B.C.; Late, 400 B.C.–A.D. 300
2. Classic (A.D. 300–1000): Early, A.D. 300–550; Late, A.D. 550–850; Terminal, A.D. 850–1000
3. Postclassic (A.D. 1000–1525): Early, A.D 1000–1200; Late, A.D. 1200–1525

Historic Periods

1. Colonial (A.D. 1525–1825): Early, A.D. 1525–1650; Late, A.D. 1650–1825
2. Ethnographic (A.D. 1825–present): Early, A.D. 1825–1900; Late, A.D. 1900–present

Cultures and periods can be identified by distinct material cultures, settlement patterns, and lifeways. The earliest Maya societies examined in this volume belong to Late Preclassic times, dating to approximately to 400 B.C. to A.D. 300. The Late Preclassic Maya, along with those of the Postclassic

Figure 1.7. Map of Mesoamerica showing geographical areas, archaeological sites, and pilgrimage centers.

period, have not been as widely investigated as Classic Maya civilization in the study region, even though Preclassic occupations are found in Classic period centers (Butler 2005; Liendo Stuardo 2008; López Varela 1989; Rands 2007). Some sites in the region are largely Preclassic in date, such as El Lacandon near Palenque (Liendo Stuardo 2008; López Bravo 2005), the newly discovered site of Noh K'uh at Lake Mensabak (Palka and Sánchez Balderas 2012), El Mirador (Hansen et al. 2008), and Lake Mendoza (Palka et al. 2007). Preclassic sites are characterized by large buildings made of earth and large stone blocks and monochrome pottery similar to the red-, orange-, and black-painted wares found in Petén (Sharer and Traxler 2006). Few carved stone monuments or hieroglyphic texts are associated with Preclassic sites compared to those of the Classic period.

The Classic period, including the Terminal Classic, is placed between A.D. 300 and A.D. 1000. The Early Classic generally dates from around A.D. 300 to 550, the Late Classic from A.D. 550 to 850, and the Terminal Classic from about A.D. 850 to 1000. A large percentage of Maya sites date to the Classic period or have occupations at this time (Butler 2005; Liendo Stuardo 2008; López Varela 1989). Well-known sites in the study region include Palenque, Yaxchilan, Bonampak, and Plan de Ayutla in Chiapas and Piedras Negras, Dos Pilas, and Tikal in Petén. Classic Maya texts and historic

Figure 1.8. Map showing the ethnic groups and pilgrimage sites of the Southern Maya Region.

documents from the area mention important ritual sites, such as Lakam Tun (Wide Stone/Island), Lakam Ha' (Wide Water), Matawil (Place of the Cormorants), and Sak Tzi' ("White Dog"; Martin and Grube 2008). Classic Maya sites can be recognized by their large urban settlements with stone-block temples with terraces, stairways, and vaulted rooms in addition to stone monuments, hieroglyphs, polychrome pottery, and carved jade. A great deal of the archaeological research conducted in the study area concentrates

on Classic period Maya sites and culture at the expense of other periods, especially the Postclassic.

The final pre-Columbian era in the region, the Postclassic period, dates from around A.D. 1000 to 1525 and ends arbitrarily with the start of Spanish colonization. However, certain aspects of Postclassic Maya material culture, like pottery and behavior (including ceremonies at shrines in the ritual landscape), continued into historic times. Postclassic Maya sites have been identified on islands, peninsulas, and shores of lakes and rivers in the southern Maya lowlands and adjacent regions (Blake 2010; Rice and Rice 2009; Rivero Torres 1992; Voorhies and Gasco 2004). Sites dating to this period in the area include Noh Peten (Flores), Tayasal, and Zacpeten in Petén and Lakamtun (Miramar), Canajaste, Las Margaritas, Petha, and Mensabak in Chiapas. Postclassic Maya sites contain small stone-block temples, low house platforms, and distinctive ceramics that include incense burners with modeled anthropomorphic or zoomorphic figures on them, round colanders, and plates with long supports, some of which bear modeled designs (Blake 2010; Lowe and Alvarez Asomoza 2007; Rice and Rice 2009; Voorhies and Gasco 2004).

HISTORIC MAYA SOCIETIES IN THE SOUTHERN MAYA LOWLANDS

I have incorporated historic information on societies in the southern Maya lowlands into this book to better examine the topics at hand. The historic documents contain many descriptions of Maya ritual landscapes, but less information is available on pilgrimage. However, we can reconstruct past Mayas' cultural practices based on historic and ethnographic information from their descendants, in addition to increasing our understanding of the origins and long-term development of contemporary Maya religious practices and ritual landscapes. I will concentrate on the historic lowland Maya, but I also reference the abundant ethnohistoric studies of highland Maya in the study area. Myriad documents regarding historic Maya peoples in the lowlands range in date from about A.D. 1525 to 1900. The records were created by priests, government officials, and explorers. The colonial period is bracketed by the dates 1525 to 1825, and the subsequent period, which coincides with ethnographic descriptions of Maya cultures, roughly dates from 1825 to the present. Documents describing Maya cultures in the southern

Maya lowlands are underutilized by archaeologists, compared to written material from Yucatán and highland Guatemala, despite their wide availability. Instead of relying on Diego de Landa's manuscript from colonial Yucatán (Tozzer 1966), for instance, investigators can peruse historic sources, many of them published, from the southern Maya lowlands (Hellmuth 1972; Palka 2005b; Thompson 1938; Vos 1988a).

This section contains descriptions of Maya peoples and cultures of the lowlands from relevant documents (see fig. 1.8; fig. 1.9). The most extensive cultural information concerns the Nohha, Ch'olti'-Lacandon, Manche-Ch'ol, and late colonial period Yucatec Lacandon Maya peoples (Feldman 2000; Hellmuth 1972; López de Cogolludo 1957; Nations 1979; Villagutierre Soto-Mayor 1983; Vos 1988a, 1988b). I use spellings of Maya groups common in the literature. Although cultural and linguistic diversity existed in these groups in the past, these societies were closely integrated over time through trade, warfare, ritual, and social interaction (Becquelin-Monod and Breton 2003; Bricker 1981; Calnek 1988; Villa Rojas 1995). Thus, they have exhibited similar economic, political, social, and religious behaviors and organizations over a long period, which is obvious from cultural comparisons. The Maya societies considered were also united in their beliefs about ritual landscapes, especially with regard to mountains, bodies of water, and caves (Thompson 1938:603; Villa Rojas 1995).

The Nohha Maya of El Próspero

Around 1646 Spanish explorers and priests encountered a Yucatec-speaking Maya community on a lake known as Nohha (*noh ha'* or "great water") in northeast Chiapas, where they established a church and demanded tribute from the native populace (López de Cogolludo 1957:684–701; Nations 1979:80–83; Scholes and Roys 1968:45–46). To reach this settlement, the Spanish crossed the Usumacinta River at Tenosique (also Tenocis, Tenosik, and Tanoche), Tabasco, and entered the valleys and lakes of the sierra of Chiapas. After a three-day journey, they could see the lake and pueblo of Nohha from the crest of a hill (López de Cogolludo 1957:687–88). Investigators have argued that Lake Naha (also Naja), currently inhabited by Yucatec-speaking northern Lacandon Maya people, is the location of historic Nohha (Nations 1979:80; Thompson 1970:69; Vos 1988a:215), and the similar place-names suggest a historic connection. However, I believe that Lake Petha, or

Figure 1.9. Map of the Southern Maya Region: archaeological sites and pilgrimage centers.

possibly Lake Mensabak (see fig. 1.9; fig. 1.10), both near Naha, was actually where Nohha was located (see also Thompson 1977:18). Lake Mensabak and Lake Petha (also known as Lake Pelja, Guineo, or Itsanok'uh), only a few hours' walk from Naha, contain Late Postclassic to historic period Maya sites. My recent surveys and discussions with local informants indicate that no archaeological sites exist at Lake Naha. Furthermore, Nohha (noh ha') also means "great/large/true lake" in Yucatec Mayan languages, thus the term was more likely used to describe the lakes of Petha or Mensabak, which

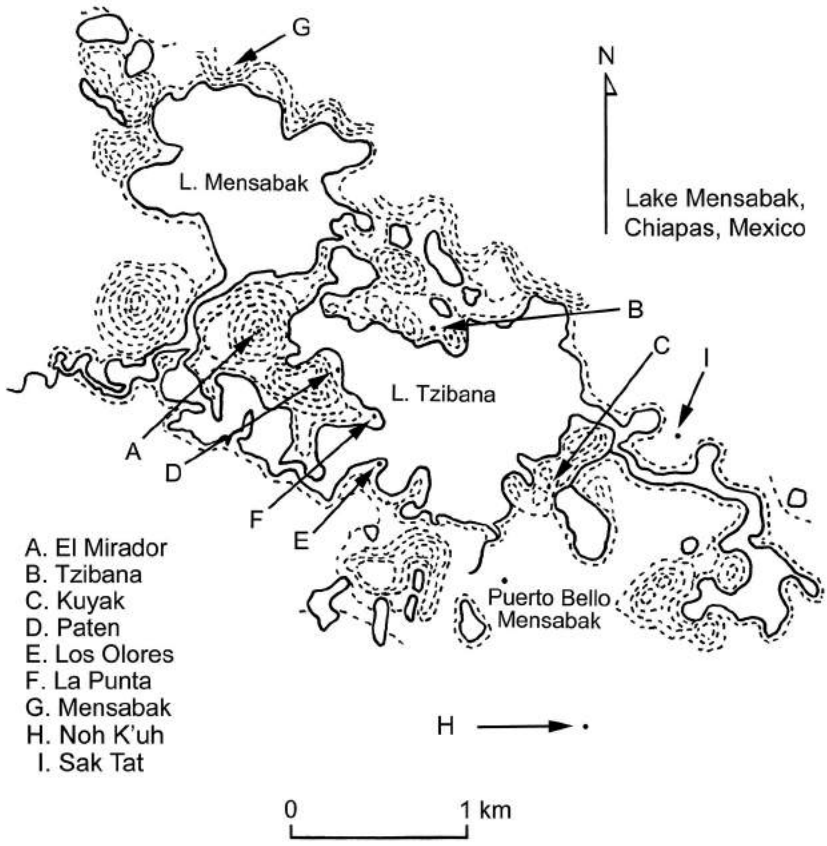

Figure 1.10. Map of the archaeological sites and pilgrimage shrines, Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico.

are much larger than Lake Naha. Moreover, Lacandon Mayas refer to Lake Petha, the biggest lake in the region, as Yahaw Petha' or "Great Lake."

The historical information on the Nohha Maya is important for archaeological research in the study area. Nohha was a principal indigenous community in a colonial province called El Próspero or Reino de El Próspero (Vos 1988a:129–30, 215). Nohha was home to three hundred apostate and unconquered Mayas in addition to their women and children ("300 personas con mujeres y niños") and other local families not counted (probably six hundred to eight hundred people; see López de Cogolludo 1957:695), which would make it comparable in size to the widely studied Tipu mission in Belize (Graham 2011; Jones 1989). These population figures also align with

the archaeological demography at Lakes Petha and Mensabak. Nohha's inhabitants were either indigenous Yucatec speakers from northeast Chiapas, or they were migrants from nearby Campeche or Petén who took over traditional Ch'ol Maya territory (Nations 1979:82–83). More than likely, the Nohha Maya differed ethnically from other Yucatec-speaking Maya peoples to the north, based on descriptions of their appearance and cultural practices (Thompson 1977:18; Vos 1988a:218–19). It is possible that the Cehach Maya (also Kehach or Quehach), located in northwest Petén and southern Campeche, were culturally related to the Maya at Nohha (Villa Rojas 1995:447). The Cehach Maya created fortified towns on islands in lakes and swamps in the region, which are similar to sites found in the study area. Spanish officials state that Nohha was inhabited by Maya peoples of various ethnicities (Nations 1979:82; Scholes and Roys 1968:46): Ch'ol, Ch'olti'-Lacandon, Yucatec, or Cehach. Importantly, Spanish colonists removed the Ch'ol Maya and later the Yucatec Maya from El Próspero to Palenque (Thompson 1966), which indicates interaction between different Maya ethnic groups in the region.

The Ch'olti'-Lacandon in Lowland Chiapas

Various Ch'olti' Mayan–speaking peoples resided in the lowlands during the colonial period (Robertson et al. 2010; Vos 1988a). The better known groups were the Ch'olti'-Lacandon societies at Lake Miramar, Sac Bahlam, Pochutla, and Topiltepeque in lowland Chiapas, which borders the Maya highlands to the west and south (Nations 1979; Vos 1988a). The Ch'olti'-Lacandon Maya area is demarcated by the Lacantun River to the south, the Usumacinta and Salinas (Chixoy) Rivers to the east, and perhaps Lakes Naha and Mensabak to the north (Caso Barerra and Aliphat Fernández 2006; Vos 1988a). Hernán Cortés heard of the Ch'olti'-Lacandon or "Lacandones" (also "caribes" and "kabnales" according to documents and highland Maya informants) from Cehach Maya people he visited on his journey through Campeche and Petén in 1525 (Vos 1988a:47; also see Scholes and Roys 1968; Villagutierre Soto-Mayor 1983). The warlike reputation of the Ch'olti'-Lacandon was well known: Dominican friars in sixteenth-century Guatemala considered the southern lowlands a native "land of war" waiting to be transformed into a colonial "land of peace" (Vos 1988a:64–67). The Spanish entradas to conquer the Ch'olti'-Lacandon were responses to these Mayas' long-term attacks on

other Maya populations in colonial towns in the lowlands and highlands of Chiapas and Guatemala (Stone 1932:239–43; Vos 1988a). The attacks were demonstrations of Ch'olti'-Lacandon resistance to Christianity: they punished colonized Maya and destroyed churches (Bricker 1981; Vos 1988a:76–79); they captured other Mayas for slaves and sacrificial victims; and they even sacked some colonial Maya villages. Importantly, significant numbers of Ch'olti'-Lacandon Mayas maintained autonomous settlements and traditional lifeways into the colonial period.

The name *Lacandon* was derived from a Ch'olti' place-name near Lake Miramar and the Lacantun River in Chiapas. This place-name, Lakam Tun or "Wide Stone," occurs in Classic Maya inscriptions (Stuart and Houston 1994:37–39). The name refers to an island in Lake Miramar that had substantial Classic and Postclassic ceremonial architecture, limestone cliffs, and was called the "gran peñon/peñol" or "great rock" by Spanish explorers (Rivero Torres 1992:22; Vos 1988a:15). Mayas in Petén and Chiapas used the name *Lakam Tun* to refer to the island in Lake Miramar, its inhabitants, and their territory. The Spanish derived the name *Lacandon* from Ch'olti' Mayan *Lakam Tun* and applied it to the island, Maya people residing nearby, and the province itself. The words *ah kan tun*, or "he/they of the sacred stone," and *Acandon* may also have been roots of the term *Lacandon* (Perera and Bruce 1985:8). Another possible origin of this ethnic Maya label was *Lakanton*—the name for lowland Maya people in Tzeltal and Tzotzil Mayan of Chiapas (Gossen 2002:722; Pineda 1986:121).

Indigenous people in Chiapas experienced demographic change at the time of contact with the Spanish (Calnek 1988; Clark and Lee 2007). By 1695, only the Ch'olti'-Lacandon Maya center of Sac Bahlam was prominently mentioned in historic sources from the Chiapas lowlands. At this time, the town had about one hundred houses and four smaller satellite communities (Comparato 1984:12; Helmuth 1972:185; Vos 1988a:136). This settlement system was possibly organized under a Maya quadripartite cosmogram with a center and four quarters. Around 1694, Ch'olti'-Lacandon from the satellite settlements established two more villages of about twenty houses each, called Peta (Petha' [?]) and Map (Mop [?]), to the north or northeast of Sac Bahlam (Vos 1988a:153, 158, 496). Another earlier center, called Culhuacan from the term for "curved mountain" in Aztec Nahuatl, was abandoned by this time (Hellmuth 1972:186; Vos 1988a:163, 165, 188). Other small pueblos, and perhaps their leaders, were called Jxulamna (Ixulamna or Sulamna [?]), Tzatztiz

(Saktz'i or Tzatzi [?]), Chichel, and Bubau (Houwald 1979:89, 419). The connections between these sites and ritual landscapes are treated later on.

Each Ch'olti'-Lacandon site (Vos 1988a:165, 188) was governed by a local noble who had elite followers, including a head priest and several lesser elites (Hellmuth 1972:186–89). The paramount chief was also the main religious specialist (Houwald 1979:89). Names of the nobles included Cabnal (Kabnal), Quin (K'in), Chichel, Tzactzi (Sak Tz'i), Chancut, and Polom (Houwald 1979:331, 352–53), and these may have been connected to important placenames. These nobles ruled over their settlements, and they also organized rituals in their communities (Estrada Monroy 1970; Houwald 1979:89–90, 350). *Cabnal* was a common name in historic sources, and Tzeltal Mayas refer to people in the lowlands as *kabinal* ("cannibal Lacandon of the forest"; Pitarch Ramón 1996:41), which indicates past interaction. The name may also refer to native places or territory, as will be discussed.

The Ch'olti'-Lacandon traveled from their island center of Lakam Tun in Lake Miramar, Chiapas, in canoes on a river, which indicates knowledge of transportation routes and contact with other Maya settlements where they could trade or migrate. Lakam Tun was connected to other settlements by trails that were important for trade and social interaction (Vos 1988a:111–12). For example, Ch'olti'-Lacandon arrived at local colonial towns and remained there with friends to trade achiote, cacao, and tobacco for salt, silver coins, and metal agricultural tools, such as axes, machetes, and knives (Caso Barerra and Aliphat Fernández 2006; Vos 1988a:132). They also traded with the Itzaj and Manche-Ch'ol Maya populations in Petén. Additionally, the Spanish resettled lowland indigenous populations to the colonial town of Ocosingo, where they maintained ties with their natal lands and populations (Becquelin-Monod and Breton 2003; Vos 1988a:88–90). Many of these Mayas escaped and moved back to their lowland centers. Others joined unconquered Maya peoples or established settlements in the forest (Vos 1988a:87). There they integrated with existing or founded new Maya settlements, possibly at Lake Mensabak.

The Itzaj Maya of Central and Western Petén

Hernán Cortés was the first known European to contact the Itzaj Maya in central Petén, Guatemala, during his epic march from Tabasco to Honduras. He described the Itzaj island stronghold of Noh Peten (Great Island) in Lake Peten

Itza and spoke of interaction with the ruler Canek (Scholes and Roys 1968; Villagutierre Soto-Mayor 1983). Records state that Itzaj Mayas fled to the island of Noh Peten following conflict in Yucatán and after an Itzaj noble kidnapped the wife of a lord of Izamal (Roys 1967:180–81). This indigenous history parallels that of the Aztecs who founded the island center of Tenochtitlan following conflicts and migration in the Postclassic period (Durán 1994). Both of these islands became important ritual centers in Late Postclassic times. Hieroglyphic texts from central Petén and adjacent areas indicate that Classic Maya nobles used the name Canek (Kan Ek') and that the place-name *Itzaj* (*itz ha'* [?] or "enchanted water" [?]) was located in the region, perhaps at Motul de San José on the western shores of Lake Peten Itza (Schele and Mathews 1998:185–90, 201–4). This place-name likely refers to the Maya sacred lake of Peten Itza itself, which was a significant ritual landscape, as was the island center of Noh Peten. It is conceivable that the Itzaj Maya, or at least some lineages within this Maya group, originated in central Petén and not in Yucatán.

The Itzaj were one of several Yucatec-speaking Maya peoples in central Petén and surrounding regions when the Spanish arrived (Rice and Rice 2009). The following discussion focuses on the Itzaj since more historical information is available for them and because they interacted extensively through trade, war, and intermarriage with Ch'ol- and Yucatec-speaking Maya peoples in the study region. This long-term interaction resulted in shared cultural traditions, including beliefs related to the ritual landscapes important for this study.

The Itzaj Maya constructed their settlements on islands and peninsulas. Smaller settlements were scattered along the shores and in the forests near the lakes. Around the time of their conquest in 1697, the Itzaj Maya ruler Canek controlled nine local settlements and interacted with others in the region (Caso Barerra and Aliphat Fernández 2002:730). These people maintained ceremonial sites in the forest, including ancient Maya ruins like Tikal (fig. 1.11). Following the Spanish conquest of central Petén in 1697, the Itzaj Maya dispersed into the southern Maya lowlands, which remained unconquered in the colonial period. In these remote regions they created new settlements, especially in western Petén and Chiapas (Caso Barrera and Aliphat Fernández 2002:734–36, 741). Itzaj together with Chavin (Chankin [?]) and Cehach Maya peoples resided in the Cun Ahau (also Chum Ahau) area in northwestern Petén near the San Pedro Mártir and Usumacinta Rivers. Itzaj Maya populations also resettled in the Tut (Tute) province located to the

Figure 1.11. Maya temple or effigy mountain, Tikal, Petén, Guatemala. Note altar in the plaza for incense burning and offerings from contemporary Maya pilgrims, including Itzaj and Q'eqchi'.

north of the Lacantun River near Lake Miramar, Chiapas. These native populations and provinces actively resisted Spanish colonialism, and they fought and destroyed fields of Mayas who allied themselves with the Spanish (Caso Barerra and Aliphat Fernández 2002:739–40).

The historic Itzaj Maya maintained contact with Ch'olti'-Lacandon and Manche Ch'ol Maya populations to the south for access to cacao, vanilla, and annatto (achiote), which was used as a red dye and seasoning for food. Other trade items included cotton, slaves, sacrificial victims, feathers, and salt (Caso Barerra and Aliphat Fernández 2006:31). The Itzaj Maya took over the robust trade in cacao and other items in the central and southern Maya lowlands in the sixteenth century by controlling the overland and riverine trade routes in addition to the salt pans at Nueve Cerros (Nine Mountains), which was once a ceremonial site of the Ch'olti'-Lacandon (Caso Barerra and Aliphat Fernández 2006:31). In fact, all the Maya peoples of central and southern Petén, in addition to Chiapas and Belize, interacted heavily by canoe along the rivers throughout this region (Caso Barerra and Aliphat

Fernández 2006). The interaction reinforced shared traditions related to ritual landscapes and their social and economic importance. For example, lowland Maya people participated in market exchange, or an "annatto fair," at a settlement of the Xocmo Maya (probably related to Itzaj or Cehach Maya) where the territories of the Itzaj, Ch'olti'-Lacandon, and Manche-Ch'ol met (Caso Barerra and Aliphat Fernández 2006:35–36). Itzaj populations depended on axes and machetes for clearing their fields, and the Maya elites also desired Spanish clothing. Thus, they maintained ties to Spanish towns and colonized Maya communities to acquire these items (Caso Barrera and Aliphat Fernández 2002:731–32; Feldman 2000).

Itzaj Maya populations were once large around Lake Peten Itza and in regions to the south and west of the lake (Rice and Rice 2009). Today, they exist only in the communities of San José and San Andrés, located on the western lakeshore (Atran et al. 2004). Since Itzaj Mayas reside in the lowlands and have cultural ties with neighboring Maya peoples in the study area, their ritual landscapes, particularly lakes, islands, and mountains, are important for this study. In historic times, Itzaj Maya frequently contacted Yucatec-speaking Lacandon Maya (Palka 2005b), with whom they shared cultural and linguistic ties. Comparatively little ethnographic research has been carried out in Itzaj Maya communities (Alejos García 2010; Atran et al. 2004; Schumann 1971), but while few direct observations of Itzaj Maya ceremonies in ritual landscapes have been recorded, we can still glean information from the ethnographies, oral histories, and linguistic data (Hofling 1991; Tesucún Chan and Tesucún 1999).

The Manche-Ch'ol Maya of Southern Petén

The lowland Manche-Ch'ol Maya were located near the Sarstoon River to the east and the Cancuen River to the west of southeastern Petén, just north of the highlands in Alta Verapaz and south of Itzaj Maya lands (Feldman 2000; Thompson 1938). Several Manche-Ch'ol Maya groups existed in this region, and they shared linguistic affinities with the Ch'olti'-Lacandon Maya to the west (Laporte 1994; Sapper 2004). In fact, the Ch'olti' Maya grammar and vocabulary used in the conversion of Ch'olti'-Lacandon people at Sac Bahlam in Chiapas were initially collected in Manche-Ch'ol territory (Feldman 2000; Robertson et al. 2010:13–16). Thus, descriptions of their culture, religion, and ritual landscapes in documents are also important for this study. The term *Manche* was derived from the Maya name of

the main settlement in the region (Stone 1932:260), and the Spanish carried out many entradas into the Manche-Ch'ol region while they attempted to pacify the Maya in Verapaz, Guatemala, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The conquest of the Manche-Ch'ol, which was never completed, was initiated following the discovery of clandestine trade between colonized and uncolonized Maya peoples and the loss of converted Mayas to the unconquered lowlands of the Manche-Ch'ol. The Spanish felt threatened by the presence of these so-called barbarous and uncivilized Maya peoples, and in the second half of the seventeenth century, Dominican friars created missions to draw in Maya populations (Thompson 1938:590). The Spanish and apparently also the Manche-Ch'ol recognized the pueblo of Manche as a primate Maya center (*cabeza de la provincia*; Scholes and Adams 1960:264; Stone 1932:247–48), and *Manche* was also the name of the Maya lineage from which the populations of all the other towns in the region had come from (Feldman 2000:26–27). Many more towns and settlements were named in the documents (Stone 1932), and the region contained both original native populations and apostate Mayas fleeing Spanish colonization (Feldman 2000:19). One Spanish estimate placed the regional population at about six thousand (Feldman 2000:20).

The Manche-Ch'ol grew large amounts of cacao, vanilla, and annatto in orchards, and these items were important for the regional trade (Caso Barerra and Aliphat Fernández 2006). Trade between the lowlands of the Manche-Ch'ol and nearby highland and lowland Maya peoples was well developed: merchants traveled the region exchanging cacao, feathers, cotton thread, textiles, chiles, beans, and copal incense (Feldman 2000:7); the Spanish and converted Mayas traded machetes and metal axes to the Manche-Ch'ol (Feldman 2000:18, 41); additionally, the northern Q'eqchi' Maya of Alta Verapaz and Petén, Guatemala, extensively traded and interacted with the Manche-Ch'ol. They became guides for Spanish entering the unconquered territory because of their language skills and social connections with Manche-Ch'ol Maya (Thompson 1938:586). Manche-Ch'ol Maya people eventually were relocated to nearby settlements of Q'eqchi' Mayas, where some assimilated and others escaped further into the forest (Feldman 2000:xxii). Because of these long-term connections and intermarriage, Q'eqchi' Mayas have strong cultural affinities with the Manche-Ch'ol Maya (Sapper 2004). Hence, I utilize the abundant ethnographic information on Q'eqchi' Maya ritual landscapes and pilgrimage.

CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES IN THE SOUTHERN MAYA REGION

In this section I use ethnographic data to introduce Maya peoples from the southern Maya lowlands and those from the surrounding highland areas with whom they interacted. Lacandon, Tzeltal, and Ch'ol Maya populations currently reside in the lowlands of Chiapas, and Tzotzil and Tzeltal Maya peoples live in the foothills and highland regions at the southern boundary of the study area. While some Tzeltal Maya groups have recently migrated to the lowlands, other populations descend from Maya peoples who lived in this area. Regardless of their traditional homelands, the Tzeltal and Tzotzil Maya of Chiapas have interacted directly with indigenous people in the lowlands over several centuries, as can be seen in the historic and ethnographic records and they share the cultural traits and religious traditions discussed in this book. I prefer to use information from Maya populations in the Southern Maya Region rather than the northern Maya lowlands in Yucatán and the highlands of Guatemala because the southern Maya are directly connected to past cultures of the region, and other authors have also noted the long-term economic and cultural ties between the contiguous areas of the eastern highlands of Chiapas, the western highlands of Guatemala, and the southern Maya lowlands (Calnek 1988; Holland 1964:301; McVicker 1974). Because of the persistent interaction between and population movements of Maya groups in the study region over time, they became familiar with or adopted their neighbors' cultural traits, including beliefs in ritual landscapes and the practice of pilgrimage. Another reason for including the southern Maya groups is the rich ethnographic information available on their religion and ritual landscapes. While the synthesis of ethnographic and archaeological studies of Maya ritual landscapes and pilgrimage would be impossible without this regional focus, I occasionally employ information from other historic and contemporary Maya cultures where we have less corroborative data from Maya cultures from the study area or where particularly salient examples of ritual landscapes and pilgrimage have been presented.

The Lacandon Maya of Chiapas and Petén

The Lacandon Maya of the ethnographic present generally can be divided into southern and northern groups in the lowland rainforests of Chiapas (Boremanse 1998a). Southern Lacandon populations are found at or near the

Figure 1.12. Early drawing of male southern Lacandon Maya pilgrims at the Classic Maya ruins of Yaxchilan, Chiapas, Mexico (after Charnay 1887:432).

community of Lacanja Chan Sayab, which is located near the ancient Maya sites of Bonampak, Lacanja, and Yaxchilan (fig. 1.12). Northern Lacandon Maya are found in the settlements of Naha and Mensabak located just southeast of the Classic Maya ruins of Palenque. Until the 1960s, Lacandon settlements were scattered throughout the rainforest and extended from northern and western Petén to northeastern Chiapas (Palka 2005b). In the mid- to late nineteenth century, Lacandon populations were found as far west as Palenque, Chiapas, where Ch'ol Maya populations currently reside. Lacandon settlements were also located in central Petén at the ruins of Tikal and near the town of Sayaxche in southwest Petén, which was once in Itzaj Maya territory. The northern Lacandon Maya have linguistic and cultural affinities with the Itzaj Maya, or perhaps the closely related Kowoj Maya, in central Petén (Hofling 2004; Pugh 2009). At the same time, southern Lacandon people may be more closely related to Yucatec Maya speakers to the north in Yucatán (or Nohha?), according to linguistic data. Lacandon Yucatec also contains words from

Ch'olan Mayan languages, such as Tzeltal and Ch'ol, in addition to Nahuatl (Bruce 1968). Linguistic data support interpretations of long-term interaction between Maya societies in the region. Importantly, contemporary Lacandon Maya populations preserve aspects of past indigenous religious beliefs, including those related to ritual landscapes and pilgrimage.

Investigators have extensively examined Lacandon Maya culture over the last century and a half (Boremanse 1998a; McGee 1990; Perera and Bruce 1985; Soustelle 1961; Soustelle 1970; Villa Rojas 1995). Surprisingly, one of the first ethnographic studies in the burgeoning field of anthropology was conducted among northern Lacandon Maya populations (Tozzer 1907). The Lacandon Maya have attracted the attention of large numbers of explorers and anthropologists since the 1930s because of their presumed connections to the ancient Maya and their supposedly unchanged lifeways. Hence, a great deal of ethnographic information is available on Lacandon people compared to other Maya groups, and investigators have recorded a significant amount of information on Lacandon religion and ritual landscapes, especially with regard to caves and cliffs, as discussed in later chapters. The Lacandon Maya traded for items that became necessities in the colonial period. Machetes, metal axes, salt, and cloth were listed as items that the Lacandon frequently sought from outsiders, including other Mayas. In return, they gave bows and arrows, tobacco, incense, food, bird pelts, and animal skins.

The Ch'ol Maya in Eastern Chiapas

Ch'ol Maya populations are currently found in towns and small agricultural settlements near the ancient Maya ruins of Palenque, east to the Usumacinta River in Chiapas, and west into the sierras bordering the state of Tabasco. Ch'ol Maya settlements are flanked by Lacandon Maya populations to the south. The Ch'ol Maya speak a Ch'olan Mayan language, which is closely related to the Ch'olti', Ch'orti', Tzeltal, and Tzotzil Mayan languages (Pérez Chacón 1993; Sapper 2004; Thompson 1938; Villa Rojas 1995). We know comparatively little about the origins of the Ch'ol Maya; however, they are likely indigenous to the lowlands. As a case in point, the Spanish removed Ch'ol Maya populations from throughout northeastern Chiapas and settled them in the adjacent communities of Palenque, Tila, and Tumbala in the colonial period (Hopkins 1988:106; Pérez Chacón 1993:183–84; Villa Rojas 1995:365–66). The Ch'ol Maya may be descended from the ancient Maya populations that built the cities in this region, such as Palenque, which were abandoned during the Classic Maya

collapse. Alternatively, they could be remnant populations of Ch'olti'-Lacandon and other Ch'olan-speaking Mayas from the Chiapas lowlands and southwestern Petén. Importantly, written documents from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries indicate that Ch'olti'-Lacandon- and Yucatec-speaking Lacandon Maya left the unconquered lowlands to live in Palenque, where they intermarried with the local Ch'ol Maya population (Becquelin and Breton 2003:344). Regardless, the Ch'ol Maya are directly linked historically and culturally to other Maya peoples in the region.

The Ch'ol Maya have been studied by anthropologists, historians, and linguists from the early twentieth century to the present. Archaeologists and art historians researching ritual landscapes in Chiapas have studied Ch'ol culture, particularly in regard to their ritual landscapes and ceremonies. Ethnographic information on Ch'ol Maya populations is not as abundant as with Lacandon and Tzotzil Maya societies, but the insights are rich regarding religion, landscape, and ritual. Crucial insights into past Maya pilgrimages to ritual landscapes, especially to caves and mountains, can be obtained from Ch'ol ethnographies.

The Tzeltal Maya of Lowland and Highland Chiapas

Traditional territories of the Tzeltal Maya were found in the Chiapas lowlands and in the highlands to the south (Becquelin and Breton 2003; Villa Rojas 1995). Tzeltal Mayas have been moving back into the lowlands since the 1960s following land reforms in southern Mexico (Perera and Bruce 1985). Today, large Tzeltal Maya agricultural communities surround the Lacandon villages of Naha, Mensabak, and Lacanja Chan Sayab in lowland Chiapas. The Tzeltal Maya currently make up the greatest number of inhabitants in lowland Chiapas (fig. 1.13). Tzeltal Maya origins are somewhat obscure, but this group may have derived from ancient lowland Maya populations that moved into the Chiapas highlands during Classic times (McVicker 1974; Vogt 1964, 1969:13). However, they may also be indigenous to the lowlands of Chiapas and to the hilly region that borders them to the south (Becquelin and Breton 2003). Archaeological investigations at Tonina near the colonial town of Ocosingo indicate that Maya people, perhaps ancestors of the Tzeltal Maya, resided in the area from the Classic period to the time of the conquest (Becquelin and Baudez 1979; Blom and La Farge 1926). Linguistic studies suggest that the Tzeltal Maya inhabited the lowlands in ancient times or at least had interacted with Maya populations in this region since Preclassic

times (Vogt 1964:193). Importantly, the Spanish relocated ancestors of the Tzeltal from the lowland forests to the neighboring towns of Ocosingo and Bachajon in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries (Becquelin and Breton 2003:340–45), and due to long-term culture contact, the Tzeltal Maya acquired cultural affinities with Maya societies in the lowlands and highlands. The linguistic and cultural borrowings are obvious when one compares the ethnographic and historic sources.

Ethnographic research on the Tzeltal Maya has become common since the 1950s (Pitarch Ramón 1996; Villa Rojas 1995). Information on the Tzeltal has focused on land tenure, social organization, and religious beliefs, and many insights on Tzeltal Maya ritual landscapes can be gleaned from these studies. The descriptions of Tzeltal ritual mountains and caves parallel those of the other Maya in the Southern Maya Region, which points to extensive cultural connections.

The Tzotzil Maya in Highland Chiapas

Tzotzil Maya communities are located in the Chiapas highlands, which physically separate them from the lowland Maya. The exchange of highland and lowland products between the Tzotzil Maya and indigenous lowland people has been brisk over a long period, at least since Preclassic times, and significantly, the Tzotzil Maya maintain fields and field houses in the lowlands. Additionally, conflicts between the Tzotzil Maya and lowland Maya populations have been common since the colonial period, or perhaps earlier. Interactions during the colonial period with Mayas from the lowland forests, such as the Ch'olti'-Lacandon, are reflected in Tzotzil oral histories (Bricker 1981; Vogt 1969:539), and the Tzotzil Maya have maintained economic ties with Ch'ol populations to the north and the Tzeltal Maya to the east. The Tzotzil Maya are linguistically and culturally related to Tzeltal- and Ch'olan-speaking Maya populations. Lowland Maya groups moved into highland Chiapas during the Classic period (McVicker 1974; Vogt 1969:12–13), and these populations may have been the direct ancestors of the Tzotzil. The Tzotzil Maya could also have descended from earlier Tzeltal populations after they reached the highlands (Vogt 1964:193). Certainly, archaeological evidence indicates substantial Postclassic populations in the area, populations that were ancestral to the contemporary Tzotzil groups (McVicker 1974). Furthermore, the artifacts recovered in excavations at highland sites demonstrate active trading relationships between Mayas in the lowlands and highlands.

Figure 1.13. Tzeltal Maya men praying at a ritual cliff for rain during agricultural ceremonies, Selva Lacandona, Chiapas, Mexico. Note the cross, candles, Virgin Mary painting, offerings, and female onlookers (photograph by Josuhé Lozada).

Much ethnographic information exists on the Tzotzil Maya, especially populations in the towns of Zinacantan and Chamula, which are adjacent to one another. These communities exhibit social differentiation, highly structured religious organizations, and continuities in ceremonial life. Importantly, anthropologists have often observed Tzotzil pilgrimages to and ceremonies at ritual places in their territories (Vogt 1981), and detailed insights on Maya mountains, caves, pools of water, cliffs, and boulders as ritual landscapes can be found in studies of Tzotzil Maya culture (Vogt 1969, 1981; Vogt and Stuart 2005). This ethnographic information, in addition to the descriptions of Tzotzil ritual landscapes and pilgrimage, is extremely important to my study, for the parallels between Tzotzil Maya and lowland Maya beliefs cannot be ignored.

The Ch'orti' Maya of Guatemala and Honduras

Scholars have demonstrated the existence of cultural and linguistic connections between Ch'orti', Manche Ch'ol, Ch'ol, and Ch'olti'-Lacandon Maya populations (Robertson et al. 2010; Sapper 2004; Thompson 1938). The Ch'orti' Maya may be the direct descendants of colonial period Maya groups

of the southern Maya lowlands, particularly the Manche-Ch'ol and Ch'olti'-Lacandon, or they may represent offshoot populations of these groups. Therefore, the rich cultural information on continuities in Ch'orti' Maya ritual landscapes and pilgrimage is important for the analysis of past Maya religious beliefs and practices in the study area.

Ch'orti' Maya populations were traditionally found in towns and agricultural hamlets in eastern Guatemala and western Honduras, but today they are mostly located near Jocotan, Guatemala (Wisdom 1940). Investigators have examined Ch'orti' culture and language over the last one hundred years (Sapper 2004; Wisdom 1940). Some ethnographic studies of the Ch'orti' Maya have stressed their cultural and linguistic roots among the ancient Maya of the southern Maya lowlands (Girard 1995). Increased research on Ch'orti' Maya culture and language in the last twenty years has explored their connections with historic Ch'olti' and Ch'ol Maya populations in Chiapas and Petén (Metz et al. 2009).

Like the other Maya ethnic groups in this study, the Ch'orti' Maya have preserved many elements of their culture, such as their belief in a rain serpent who resides in mountains and springs (fig. 1.14). Furthermore, ethnographic research on the Ch'orti' Maya has given anthropologists extensive insights on their ritual landscapes and pilgrimages to them (Girard 1995). Descriptions of Ch'orti' Maya rituals taking place at mountains, pools of water, and cliffs provide significant comparative data for our understanding of past ritual landscapes. Additionally, unique ethnographic information on Ch'orti' pilgrimages, such as their ritual journeys to springs and the cathedral at Esquipulas (Girard 1995), is crucial for interpreting the nature of pilgrimage to ritual landscapes in Maya culture.

In this chapter I have provided essential archaeological information regarding the cultural periods, geographical subregions, and sites of the Southern Maya Region referred to throughout this book. I have also made reference to historic documents describing Maya societies that can be linked to the archaeological record. Past Maya cultural practices in the study area are important for understanding the connections between place, religion, and identity that we will examine later.

Additionally, I have discussed contemporary Maya cultures of the Southern Maya Region. These Maya peoples are descendants of the archaeologically and historically known Maya groups that concern us here. The Maya cultures I have outlined in the text developed together over centuries

Figure 1.14. Ch'orti' Maya festival and the great horned rain serpent Noh Chih Chan with rattlesnake tail, headdress, and god eyes with scrolled pupils, Jocotan, Guatemala.

of extensive interaction, and ethnographic descriptions of their ritual landscapes and pilgrimage practices can provide insight into past behaviors. At the same time, the available archaeological and historical information can be used to understand the development of modern cultures. The connections between Maya cultures past and present will be important for clarifying the shared traditions found in the metastructure of Maya religion and identity, which includes pilgrimage to ritual landscapes over the last two thousand years. As we will see in the next chapter, Maya pilgrimage and concepts of ritual landscape are similar to those found in other Mesoamerican societies. They also parallel behaviors across the globe that, in turn, enable us to better understand Maya beliefs.

CHAPTER TWO

Pilgrimage, Ritual Landscapes, and Material Culture

> The [ritual leaders] move up the San Antonio Mountain to make their promises [to El Señor of Tila, Chiapas], afterwards they go to the cave where "El Señor" was hidden a long time ago; in this place they finish their ceremony of promises and go back to their homes to wait to see if their petitions were successful.
>
> —Ch'ol Maya narrative, José L. Pérez Chacón, *Los Choles de Tila y su mundo*, 1993, 225

This epigraph indicates that pilgrimage to a Ch'ol Maya mountain and cave—very important Maya ritual landscapes—is necessary for communicating with spiritual forces to receive from them crops, good health, and protection. The narrative shows that Maya people do not have to travel long distances to maintain the covenants with their gods, especially when these are community deities, and furthermore, separation from and then return to their homes are critical aspects of the pilgrims' goals, as they are in other cultures. For the comparative and theoretical viewpoints in this chapter, I concentrate on the geographic, material, symbolic, and behavioral aspects of pilgrimage in a cross-cultural perspective. I explore ritual landscapes, artifacts, and imagery at these places as well as the salient reasons why people carry out religious pilgrimages. Pilgrimages to ritual landscapes provide highly physical and sensory experiences that are central to religious life. Pilgrimages are also important for community identities, politics, and local economies. Throughout the chapter, I establish that Maya society in

the southern Maya lowlands is part of a long-standing Mesoamerican "pilgrimage culture" in which pilgrimage to innumerable shrines or homes of gods is common practice. I use archaeology, history, and ethnography collectively to illuminate the dynamics and metastructure of Mesoamerican pilgrimage in the longue durée.

PILGRIMAGE IN A CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

In this section I concentrate on cross-cultural features of pilgrimage that are important for understanding beliefs and practices in Mesoamerican civilization. Many functions of pilgrimage, ranging from the economic to the religious, medical, and political, are discussed in the literature (Coleman and Elsner 1995; Crumrine and Morinis 1991; Dubisch and Winkelman 2005; Eade and Sallnow 2000; Morinis 1992; Stoddard and Morinis 1997). Social cohesion, development of trade networks, desire for good health, practicing of imperial religion, and fulfillment of religious doctrine are among the major impetuses for pilgrimage covered in previous studies. Pilgrimages can be carried out for many purposes at the same time, according to the social contexts involved. Through an examination of archaeological, historical, and ethnographic sources, I focus on the religious aspects of pilgrimage and how pilgrimage intersects with ritual landscapes and social life, particularly with regard to separation and transformation, politics and the economy, and community identity and territory.

While it may have diverse functions, I view pilgrimage as a ceremonial journey to ritual landscapes that takes place in accordance with myths and beliefs in supernatural forces associated with these special sites (Winkelman and Dubisch 2005:x–xii); people travel to these places to communicate with spiritual forces in order to achieve specific religious goals, enact their social and political roles, reinforce their identity, and engage in trade. Pilgrimage fundamentally involves people's movement from domestic settings to ritual landscapes, or going "beyond one's own physical environment" (Dillon 1997:xviii), and then back again to their settlements. Pilgrims visit the very homes of the gods and ancestors in the ritual landscape, which are unusual geographic places where only deities are found, such as impressive hills, caves, and bodies of water (fig. 2.1). People visit such places to make requests to or fulfill obligations to the supernatural beings in order to maintain balance in the world. Religious devotion, ceremonial transformation, and the

Figure 2.1. Ritual mountain shrine of Machu Picchu, Peru (photograph by Maura Toro-Morn).

construction of social identity also operate in pilgrimage; however, economics, initiation, personal healing, and political competition are seen here as secondary functions, as they may not always occur in Mesoamerican pilgrimages. The movement of the body and stimulation of the senses, such as touch and sight, are also central to pilgrimage. Pilgrims, who travel individually or in large numbers, leave behind their daily lives to be exposed to religious architecture, imagery, topography, and ritual, which build collective social identity (Turner and Turner 1978).

Pilgrimages can be carried out in fulfillment of promises to spiritual beings and are often contingent upon divine responses to situations of potential danger to self, family, or community. Motivations for a pilgrimage to contact supernatural forces may include requesting a favor, offering thanks, fulfilling a vow, expressing penitence, meeting an obligation, or gaining merit or salvation (Stoddard 1997:56). Pilgrimages are enacted to maintain or acquire cosmic and social balance, but they are also often about addressing everyday concerns, such as human suffering, disease, social ills, economic problems, or poor crops (Winkelman and Dubisch 2005:xi). These problems may have been caused by perceived sins and negative actions of the pilgrims or may be a form of divine punishment. Finally, pilgrimages are transformational due to the

journey from domestic to spiritual realms and back again: people leave their ordinary lives to heal or change themselves, their families, or their communities (Turner and Turner 1978; Winkelman and Dubisch 2005:xix).

Pilgrimage sites draw people from distant lands; however, they are important for local populations as well, especially for the construction of social identity and for the community's economy. Ancient Greek shrines, for instance, attracted people from local polities and across Europe (Dillon 1997:xiii). Thus, pilgrimage and ritual landscapes can unite people of the same ethnic or religious group no matter where they originate. Shrines can draw large crowds during important events and organized festivals, or they may be visited by a few individuals throughout the year. Scheduled events at Olympia, for example, drew thousands of pilgrims (Dillon 1997:xiii, 45). But regardless of their popularity, pilgrimage shrines are important economically, for they become part of local markets and allow people to acquire goods from afar. For these social and economic reasons, pilgrimage places are often visited over great spans of time (Turner and Turner 1978). Pilgrimage sites are marked not only by special geographical features but also through distinctive architecture, such as sanctuaries, plazas, walkways, baths, enclosures, and tombs (Adair 1978). Material culture at the shrines is tied to pilgrimage, like amulets, carvings or graffiti, and paintings, in addition to portable offerings like small stones or potsherds, votive figurine offerings, objects in miniature, and reliquaries. At the shrines pilgrims provide offerings and prayer for the energies to intercede on their behalf for spiritual or material benefit and to bring order to their lives and the cosmos. People leave artifacts at shrines, as if leaving their concerns there. They place testimonials and offerings in shrines, gain merit from the gods, or express thanks and their wishes with material items (Clift and Clift 1996:76–77).

Pilgrims receive blessings from proximity to or contact with a holy place, person, or object in which spiritual power is concentrated (Turner and Turner 1978). Seeing and touching religious objects along with kneeling, bathing, or sleeping at a shrine are acts that allow pilgrims to absorb the spiritual powers present. People also remove things from the walls and surrounding area of shrines to take home, including sand, dirt, rocks, water, and locally made pilgrims' tokens. Oftentimes the contact with the divine is more direct. In ancient Greece, for instance, pilgrims communicated with deities through oracles who advised them on political, economic, or personal matters (Dillon 1997:xiv). Pilgrims may also achieve communion with spiritual

forces through mimesis, or the imitation of divine events, beings, or actions. Gestures, movements through a place, and the manipulation of objects to mimic divine beings and their behaviors are common at pilgrimage shrines. Pilgrimage alters consciousness, which brings people closer to spiritual realms, their religion, themselves, fellow pilgrims, and their communities.

Terms related to pilgrimage suggest that past European and New World societies perceived these journeys differently than do contemporary Westerners. In the past, pilgrimage was viewed in the context of travel or separation from the domestic realm and local community. The Latin word *peregrinatio* (the origin for the Spanish *peregrino* or "pilgrim"), for instance, originally meant "going abroad." Similarly, the Greek term *xenos* meant "traveler" or "stranger," but ancient Greece had no word for pilgrim, just terms for "those going or those coming," "to sacrifice," "to consult an oracle," or "to watch" (Dillon 1997:xv). The term *pilgrimage* usually refers to religiously motivated travel to a *locus sanctus*, a sacred (a term often used in studies of pilgrimage) place, a shrine, or a religious structure, like a cathedral (Vikan 2010:3, 9). Thus, the word *pilgrimage* connotes movement, separation, and ritual place. Chinese pilgrims describe pilgrimage as "paying one's respects to a mountain," "present[ing], burn[ing], or divid[ing] incense [in a fire in an incense burner]," "obtaining blessings and averting calamities," or "travelling in all four directions" (Naquin and Yü 1992:11–12, 15–16). As we will see, similar concepts are found in Mesoamerican cultures.

While pilgrimages may be carried out for many significant reasons and in many ways, we can better understand those of Maya culture by looking at Byzantine pilgrimage sites and their material culture (Vikan 2010). Byzantine pilgrimage sites contained shrines (*loca sancta*), miracle-working saints and their relics, and material offerings and sacrifices associated with *miracula* and *vitae*. Pilgrims visited Byzantine shrines, many of which were used for centuries and maintained by local political and religious organizations, to pray to Christ and the saints. Behavior at the shrines included touching, kissing, and bowing to monuments and objects representing divine forces. Pilgrims visited several sites over a long period and covered great distances (to "the other end of the earth") to behold miracle-working saints and relics, in addition to other attractions, such as strange rocks and objects (Vikan 2010:4–5), and many pilgrims sought cures through contact with holy people, divine energies, and materials at the shrines. Vast numbers of worshipers sought to renew their faith through or receive information from oracles regarding personal, religious, and business matters. Pilgrimages mobilized

people, wealth, and creativity, and they supported large economies, including inns, markets, merchants, craftspersons, and clergy (Vikan 2010:3). Movements of crowds were orchestrated, as when people were funneled to a shrine by a narrowing road (Vikan 2010:6). Byzantine pilgrimage shrines also had large public works, such as churches, bazaars, baths, and rest houses, created by local organizations and merchants.

Separation, Experience, and Transformation

Pilgrimages have important functions that must be considered in our study of Maya religious beliefs and analysis of the supporting archaeological, iconographic, and cultural evidence. I am especially concerned with pilgrims' intercessions with spiritual forces in ritual landscapes to act on their behalf and for their desire to cement community identity and maintain cosmic balance, especially during times of stress. Journeys involving prominent landforms that are difficult to access, such as waterfalls, mountains, islands, and caves, are integral to the meaning of pilgrimage (Candy 2009:i, 7). These ritual landscapes contrast sharply with secular space, and they represent extraordinary places of spiritual significance where people can communicate with the divine (Stoddard 2010). Pilgrimage shrines can be conceived as a structural inversion of universal conditions in that people spatially separate the shrines from daily life by placing them in peripheral locations (Freidel 1981:380). Some pilgrimage shrines can be seen as more important than others for contacting deities and for achieving people's spiritual goals; hence, the power of specific sanctuaries is significant in pilgrimages, and the nature and history of these ritual sites help shape their place in a shrine hierarchy. Not only is the power of place culturally construed, the physical attributes of impressive pilgrimage places, like a huge cavern or a tall waterfall, can impact people's bodies and their behavior.

Experiences, movements, and the senses themselves can be enhanced through the special physical characteristics of ritual sites, which include high places, bodies of water, coastal protuberances, or a combination of significant geographical features (Bhardwaj 1997:7; Stoddard 1997:54). The movement of and impacts on the human body and senses are central to the experience of undertaking ritual pilgrimages (Candy 2009:13). The movement of the body in pilgrimage is choreographed through roads, steps, gates, terraces, architecture, and prescribed circumambulations (Candy 2009:132–34). This bodily interaction with the landscape in pilgrimage is essential for constructing meaning,

developing sensations, and realizing its goals (Candy 2009:2). Bodies tire while traveling to shrines; people see, touch, taste, and hear new things on pilgrimages; human body icons adorn sanctuaries; and the bodies of significant members of society are often interred at shrines. People frequently bathe in purifying waters and eat sacred earth at shrines in order to heal their bodies: throughout ancient Greece, pilgrims traveled to oracle shrines to have the resident deities heal their bodies (Dillon 1997:xiv). Also, people commonly visit shrines to request children and safe pregnancies.

An arduous journey or procession to a shrine separated from a human settlement, in addition to the unusual features of the shrine, can be important for pilgrims' communication with divine beings. Pilgrimage to a ritual landscape can provide a temporal reorientation (Winkelman and Dubisch 2005:xx) with reference to historic, prehistoric, and religious traditions, such as myths about creation, the origins of the material world, and beliefs and practices regarding the resolution of personal and social ills. Movements to shrines enable pilgrims to pray "through their feet" (Candy 2009:133–34), and the journey to a shrine that is more difficult to access leads to a heightened personal and religious transformation for pilgrims, or they may accrue merit by making the effort (Clift and Clift 1996:66–67). Boat crossings, crawling, moving up and down hills, and walking on one's knees all make access to pilgrimage shrines more difficult. Traveling done slowly, by foot, is an act that symbolizes pilgrimage: "Wherever we passed along the streets they burned away our footprints" (Vikan 2010:6). Impressions of hands and feet were important to Byzantine pilgrims, who felt that these signs worked miracles. Footprints and handprints frequently occur in pilgrimage shrine imagery in Byzantine sites and across the globe, including at Chaco Canyon, Canyonlands National Park, and other sites in the southwest United States (fig. 2.2), and they are proof of the presence of both divine beings and pilgrims (Bauer and Stanish 2001:184, 224–28; Mendiola Galván 2005). Footprints (fig. 2.3) and traveling barefoot also symbolize the cosmic journey and contact with sacred earth at Hindu shrines (Singh 2002:17). Touch—of hands, feet, or objects with other objects—is important as physical contact with sacred things transfers special powers to pilgrims (Clift and Clift 1996:154–55; Coleman and Elsner 1995:60, 108; Vikan 2010:25). In Greek healing shrines, people believed that deities touched pilgrims with their hands to cure them (Dillon 1997:76). Pilgrim tokens carry impressions of skin from human hands, which are probably associated with the touch of saints and healing (Vikan 2010:56–57).

Figure 2.2. Composite drawing of Ancient Pueblo rock art on cliffs with footprints, handprints, and a face from the Needles region, Canyonlands National Park, Utah. Note the circles in the palms (top drawing by Paulina Makuch; not to scale).

Besides touch, sight, too, is central to the pilgrimage experience, since seeing was thought to be a type of touching with "that ray from our eye" (Vikan 2010:26). Seeing ritual landscapes and the material culture found there is crucial for religious activity. In the Hagia Sophia, for instance, Byzantine pilgrims described how they could still see the painted and carved impressions of Christ's hands and feet on stones and columns, from which blessings were drawn (Vikan 2010:58). These pilgrims reported seeing the footprints of Christ on top of the Mount of Olives, which were found in the sand where pilgrims walked (Vikan 2010:43–44). During visits to shrines, a person can envision things that are not there, such as hidden holy objects, spiritual beings, sacred realms, or past actions. Likewise, the eyes, limbs, and other parts of the body were believed to be healed by votive offerings related to the senses, such as pieces of silver, gold, or wood engraved with human eyes, feet, and hands (Vikan 2010:74).

The movement of the body through processions and circumambulations

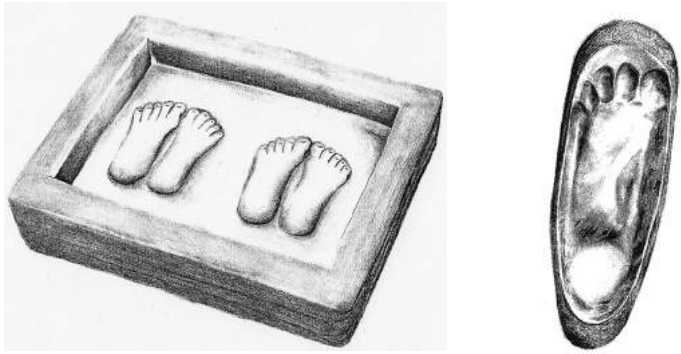

Figure 2.3. Footprints in pilgrimage iconography: sculpted marble footprints from a shrine in Pakistan (left; drawing by Paulina Makuch after Barnes and Branfoot 2006:64, fig. 62); and an Olmec jade celt from El Manatí shrine, Veracruz, Mexico (right; drawing by Paulina Makuch after Escalante Gonzalbo 2005:20; not to scale).

is a common form of worship at pilgrimage shrines (Stoddard 2010:2). Circuits and processions, including circumambulation and circular travel from home to shrine and back home again, represent the interconnectedness of pilgrims and the divine forces necessary for healing, solidarity, growth, and the strengthening of community. Pilgrims' movements to and within ritual space allow them to engage each other as well as the specific energies in the landscape and architecture. These movements are part of the pilgrimage journey and the "difficulty of access" of pilgrimage shrines that lead to the achievement of pilgrims' religious goals.

Identity in Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage can create and maintain social identities, specifically with regard to religious affiliation, ethnicity, community identity, and lineage. One source of the link between pilgrimage and identity is shared religious beliefs. People who hold similar religious beliefs make pilgrimages to the same shrines, which are known through religious tradition and the collective recognition of their physical and material attributes. At the shrines worshipers adhere to the tenets of their faith and their ceremonial practices. People who do not follow the religious traditions do not, or cannot, participate in pilgrimages to the shrines. Furthermore, pilgrimage centers are often located in the territories of particular communities or polities. Worshipers visiting these shrines belong to

communities, ethnic groups, or nations in whose territories the centers are found. The creation of ritual landscapes and the religious shrines within them are common ways for cultures to mark ancestral lands, current territory, and social identity. For example, people in the ancient Greek world made pilgrimages to local shrines to reinforce their ethnic identity, of which the Ionian festival to Apollo on the island of Delos was part (Dillon 1997:xiv).

Burials and cemeteries at pilgrimage shrines are also essential for constructing social identity and community territory. Graves of religious figures, political leaders, and family members draw pilgrims to these shrines for contact with ancestors and the sacred remains of deified ancestors and other individuals (McAnany 1995). For instance, the city of Santiago de Compostela in Spain was believed to contain the tomb of Saint James (*compostela* means "burial ground"; Candy 2009:5). People in China view the dead as powerful spirits who require ritual visits and attention at tomb mounds seen as effigy mountains (Naquin and Yü 1992:13–15), and the tumuli of Chinese kings and preserved bodies of monks also marked important places of ritual. The dead buried in religious sanctuaries come into contact with divine forces and complete their cycle by traveling to the spiritual realm to be reborn again. However, the dead may be placed in ritual locales to cleanse impurities and protect the living from associated dangers (Lochtefeld 2010:181–82). The ancestors also mediate between living descendants and spiritual forces.

Politics, Power, and Privilege

Politics, of course, come into play in pilgrimage. Political elites, community officials, state officials, and religious leaders create or regulate pilgrimage shrines across the world (Adams 1983; Dillon 1997; Naquin and Yü 1992:13; Nthoi 2006). Elites are involved in the making of pilgrimage sites to follow the tenets of their faith, assist in the maintenance of solidarity in ethnic and religious groups, and to acquire status and followers within their communities (Ringle et al. 1998). State-controlled shrines are important for projecting a formal religious ideology and for legitimizing people's social and political positions in society (Bauer and Stanish 2001:18–190). Political and religious leaders often organize the labor and resources needed to build and maintain shrines, and elites can also facilitate economic activity at pilgrimage centers by establishing markets and interregional trade. For example, the authorities of the Catholic Church together with the Christian monarchs of Spain were

instrumental in creating devotion to Saint James and sustaining the pilgrimage routes and center of Santiago de Compostela during the rise of the Catholic state in Spain (Candy 2009:5). Elites and communities have vied with one another for ownership or control of the pilgrimage sites that most effectively promoted communication with divine forces to achieve desired results, including healing and oracular divination, like at the chasm of the Delphic oracle in ancient Greece (Dillon 1997:81–82). Such exalted places in the hierarchy of pilgrimage sites, including Santiago de Compostela, brought political power, social prestige, and economic benefits to local communities and elites. In Mesoamerica, the shrines at Cozumel, Cholula, and Chalma, in addition to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, can be viewed as regionally powerful in this light. However, a shrine's importance waxes and wanes depending on its efficacy in channeling responses from spiritual forces; the shifting fortunes of the communities, polities, and persons it is associated with; and whether it is protected or destroyed (Dillon 1997).

Kantner and Vaughn (2012) point out that ancient pilgrimages were costly for both elites and non-elites. Elites organize the construction of pilgrimage centers and finance feasting and public rituals, as they did at the sites of Chaco Canyon in New Mexico and Cahuachi in Peru. Pilgrimage shrines develop and fade depending on the perceived efficacy of the elites in ritual and the level of commitment to the pilgrimage endeavor by non-elites. The involvement of elites in pilgrimage at shrines is important for they reaffirm their religious beliefs, mediate with spiritual forces to ameliorate unpredictable outcomes, and engage their non-elite supporting populations. Their managing of pilgrimage centers and rituals boosts their power, status, and economic influence. Archaeological evidence at Chaco and Cahuachi—including ceremonial architecture, fine burial furniture, and high-status goods, such as polychrome pottery and marine shell—indicates costly signaling behaviors of and competition among elites. At the same time, pilgrimages are costly for non-elites for they must expend effort and resources to travel to shrines and support themselves while away from home. Commoners leave material goods as offerings to signal their participation in the rites. They pay this cost to demonstrate their adherence to religious and social mores and obtain ritual, social, and economic benefits. Non-elites also collectively provide the labor to build shrines under the direction of elites. However, the cost of pilgrimage ritual for all social classes results in shared religion, collective identity, social solidarity, and, ultimately, cooperation, prosperity, and survival.

Political factions, special interest groups, and social hierarchies are often maintained during pilgrimages (Eade and Sallnow 2000). Additionally, men frequently manage pilgrimages and the shrines themselves, even shrines dedicated to the concerns of women. In ancient Greece, women participated in pilgrimages regarding fertility and women's festivals, but men maintained the shrines and organized the events, even if they were only attended by women (Dillon 1997:183–84). Here and in other societies around the world, men have controlled politics, resources, and state religions through their high status, gender roles, and ritual purity, resulting in their monopoly on pilgrimage and its political, social, and economic importance in society.

Economic Benefits

The close relationship between economics and pilgrimage has been widely discussed (Freidel 1981; McCorriston 2011; Sabloff and Rathje 1975; Wells and Nelson 2007). Pilgrimage provides the venues and ritual contexts for cooperation between various social groups that is needed for successful economic interaction (Kantner and Vaughn 2012). Clearly, economic opportunities arise when large numbers of people get involved in collective activities. Pilgrims require places to stay, food, offerings for deities, and objects to take home to family members. Pilgrims purchase these goods and services or barter for them at the markets and fairs that spring up near pilgrimage centers (Dillon 1997:214–16). Traders and itinerant craftspersons may be present at pilgrimage shrines and fairs as well. Pilgrims may have to pay fees when they arrive at shrines, as in ancient Greece (Dillon 1997:166–68). Worshipers traveling to shrines can take advantage of pilgrimage events by acquiring items in areas away from their settlements or selling local goods there; in doing so, they essentially diversify their markets. Elites, state officials, and religious specialists often get involved in the structuring of economic activities at pilgrimage sites. Subsequently, regional trade systems also grow around pilgrimage shrines. The importance of the economics of pilgrimage sites can be seen in the growth of communities, marketplaces, and material wealth as well as the availability of exotic items.

Pilgrimage Art, Architecture, and Artifacts

An analysis of material culture and iconography in a cross-cultural perspective enhances our understanding of Mesoamerican and Maya pilgrimage

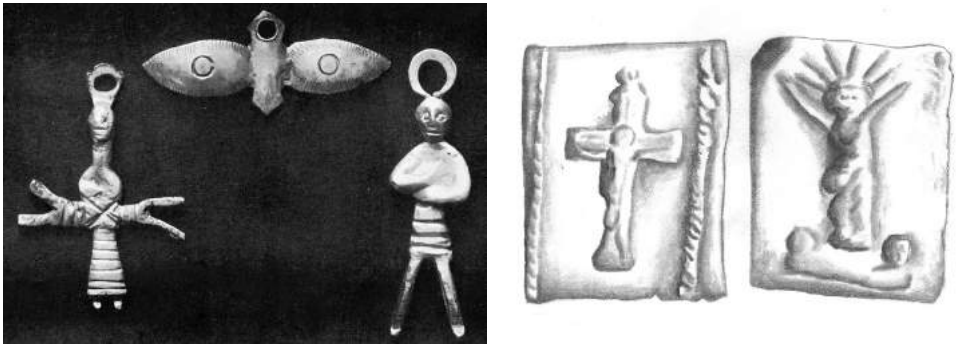

Figure 2.4. Maya metal votive offerings of body parts from a church in Yucatán for curing eye, limb, and other bodily ailments (after Gann 1926:109) and small clay pilgrims' tablets as curing blessings, Esquipulas, Guatemala (drawing by Paulina Makuch after Borhegyi 1954:394, fig. 5; not to scale).

behavior. At pilgrimage shrines around the world, archaeologists have recovered small, portable artifacts, including pilgrim tokens or "blessings," and votive offerings (fig. 2.4). These objects are known as "thank offerings" in Greek texts on the objects themselves or in pilgrim narratives (Dillon 1997). A pilgrim gives votive offerings to spiritual forces to gain merit, show devotion, make a payment, or to point out troubles and ailments to be rectified. Divine blessings may be received through an object or material acquired at a sacred shrine or a ritual place nearby, including earth, oil, cloth, water, relics, and pieces of the shrine itself (Vikan 2010). Importantly, these things have to be small so they can be carried by traveling pilgrims: easily taken back to people at home or curated in local sanctuaries. Excavations at the Byzantine shrine of Abu Mina southwest of Alexandria uncovered kilns and molds for manufacturing pilgrims' flasks made out of local clay that were decorated with images of saints and relics and used to carry sacred water, oil, dust, resins, and supernatural energies (Vikan 2010:33–35).

Sympathetic magic is important with regard to material culture at pilgrimage shrines; for example, pilgrim tokens depicting bent-over figures help heal back pain, and votive offerings with eye motifs cure blindness (Vikan 2010:27–29). The materials taken from shrines are believed to protect, empower, restore, heal, and sanctify their owners, and kaolin clay cakes acquired at the Esquipulas pilgrimage shrine in Guatemala and seen as divine blessings are a good example of such material (Borhegyi 1954). Other materials for devotional offerings include small stones, shells, ancient artifacts, miniature items, and

potsherds, which collect in piles at shrines (Tedlock 2010:6, fig. 2). Furthermore, people cache objects and pilgrimage tokens at or near shrines, as was done at Byzantine ritual enclosures (Vikan 2010:31). Pilgrims left certain objects of cultural or economic value as votive offerings at these shrines to pay for something they had received or hoped to receive, such as a miracle cure or a successful trade venture (Vikan 2010:71). In another example, archaeologists recovered thousands of terra-cotta plaques depicting Buddha at a pilgrimage shrine in Thailand, where these votive offerings were used by monks to accumulate merit in the presence of the deity (Proser 2010:156). At the Olmec site of San Lorenzo, Veracruz, Mexico—a ritual hill on an island with monumental stone sculpture—several tons of small perforated iron ore (ilmenite) cubes or beads from southern Mexico were deposited in specific locations, possibly by pilgrims, as votive offerings, payments, or pilgrimage tokens (Symonds 2006:56). Votive offerings at Old World shrines have included pilgrim coins, ornaments, jewelry, furniture, exotic animals, and precious stones, some with inscriptions. Votive inscriptions, symbols, portraits, murals, graffiti, and other designs also were placed by pilgrims on shrine walls, floors, and furniture (Vikan 2010:71–73). Signatures, prayers, scenes with saints and pilgrims, and cross shapes are some votive designs found at Byzantine shrines to acknowledge or invoke help from saints. Touching and removing sacred materials as blessings from spiritual forces, such as dust from scratched and gouged walls, were also important in this case. Incense was particularly important at many pilgrimage shrines, since people viewed the smoke as a vehicle for conveying prayer and offerings to spiritual realms (Vikan 2010:51). Additionally, the smell of incense drew supernatural beings to the supplicant, which explains why incense burners are common artifacts at ritual landscapes across the globe.

Pilgrimage art, architecture, and artifacts from cultures across time and space have captured the attention of art historians, anthropologists, and scholars of religion (Adair 1978; Barnes and Branfoot 2006; Coleman and Elsner 1995; Fields and Zamudio-Taylor 2001; Proser 2010; Singh 2002; Townsend, ed. 1992; Turner and Turner 1978; Vikan 2010). Temples, plazas, altars, roads, steps, terraces, and burial shrines are all common at pilgrimage sites. Iconography found in pilgrimage shrines and associated objects depict the divine beings, material culture, and ceremonies associated with the shrine or represent the actual journey to the shrine. Byzantine tokens, for instance, depict saints with their arms raised and hands open standing near incense burners, lamps, and ships—the means for pilgrims' travel (Vikan 2010:20–22). Byzantine pilgrims remarked that "when you look at the imprint [impression] of the image [on the

pilgrim token made from sacred clay], it is us [pilgrims] that you will see" (Vikan 2010:48). As mentioned earlier, footprints and handprints can also be found at pilgrimage shrines and in ritual landscapes. Rock art at the shrines is also common (see Adair 1978:175, 182, and 195).

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF PILGRIMAGE

The study of pilgrimage to ritual landscapes has recently come to the forefront of much archaeological fieldwork (Brady 2000; Candy 2009; McCorriston 2011; Silverman 1993). Investigators have focused on pilgrimage, its material manifestations, and its religious and social functions as primary research topics in the study of past behavior, especially that of ancient Andean civilizations (Bauer and Stanish 2001; Burger 1992; Kantner and Vaughn 2012; Patterson 1985; Shimada et al. 2004; Silverman 1991, 1994). However, direct archaeological research on pilgrimage is currently not well developed in Mesoamerica (but see Andrews 1970; Brady 1989, 2000; Freidel 1975; Freidel and Sabloff 1984; Patel 2009; Sabloff and Rathje 1975; Stone 1992, 1995; Walker 1990; Zeitlan 2008), despite the recognized importance of indigenous pilgrimage in South America. Discussions of pilgrimage within explanations of site structure and archaeological deposits in Mesoamerica are common, but the behavioral and theoretical implications of pilgrimage for an understanding of indigenous religion and social life are not discussed in detail (Arroyo 2010; Brady and Prufer 2005; Miller 1982; Shaw 2008; Stone 1995).

The importance of ritual landscapes (treated in the next chapter) to pilgrimage in different cultures has been explored in archaeology (Burger 1992; Bauer and Stanish 2001; Brady and Prufer 2005; Patel 2009; Proser 2010; Silverman 1994). Particular landscapes have been important cross-culturally, even though the number of potential ritual places is infinite. Truly unique geographical features have long attracted pilgrims, like the Island of the Sun in Lake Titicaca, Bolivia; the volcano lakes of central Mexico (Kubler 1984); and the impressive Naj Tunich Cave in Guatemala (Brady 1989, 2000; Brady and Sears 2000; Stone 1995). Machu Picchu, with its ritual mountains, rock shrines, and temples, can be considered as an Andean pilgrimage sanctuary as well (see fig. 2.1). Ritual landscapes have been shown to be associated with sanctuaries, ceremonial architecture, ritual artifacts, astronomical alignments, and statuary over long time spans (Bauer and Stanish 2001; Brady 2000). People modify ritual landscapes by building shrines, terraces, and

plazas on them (Silverman 1993:59–60), and roads, shrines, geoglyphs, and rock art may be aligned toward ritual landscapes to guide pilgrims to them and demarcate sacred space (Silverman 1993:305–7; Trombold 1991:164–65). The ritual sites often contain temples, conjoining plazas, protective walls, long stairways, and terraced walkways to accommodate visitors. Modifications to natural topography, such as terraced hills, are also common (Silverman 1993:301).

Because of the great time depth of their material signatures, pilgrimages have been characterized as metastructures in human societies, like households and interregional trade networks, that survive the ebbs and flows of political, religious, and economic changes to unite people within and between societies over the centuries (Kantner and Vaughn 2012; McCorriston 2011). Archaeologists have also demonstrated that large pilgrimage sites were built by pilgrims over long periods and not only by state corvée labor drafts in single building episodes, since the requisite population numbers and political apparatus were sometimes lacking (Silverman 1993). Pilgrimage sites at ritual landscapes—such as Paleolithic caves with paintings in Europe, the eleven-thousand-year-old hilltop shrine of Gobekli Tepe in Turkey, burial mounds with stone monument clusters in Europe, and Neolithic cattle shrines in the Near East (McCorriston 2011)—are among the earliest known forms of collective prestate human ritual expression that influenced later religious developments.

Besides identifying important ritual landscapes, investigators have noted the distinct archaeological signatures of pilgrimage sites and associated behaviors in the material record (Kantner and Vaughn 2012; Silverman 1993). The relative absence of quotidian domestic remains, such as permanent household architecture, extensive fields, typical settlement patterns, normal burial practices, and everyday food preparation utensils, is key to recognizing pilgrimage sites (Silverman 1993:300–301), and this absence combined with the preponderance of evidence of ritual space and ceremonial artifacts allow investigators to make solid identifications of pilgrimage sites and their itinerant users. Shrine constructions, votive offerings, sacrificial victims, pilgrim amulets, and special-context burials and caches in caves, altars, or shrine cemeteries can be important ceremonial signatures (Silverman 1993:305; Vikan 2010). Sacrifice and offerings to propitiate spiritual forces are also common in pilgrimage sites (Dillon 1997:xv), and these ritual practices leave recognizable material remains. Pilgrimage offerings and amulets tend to be similar in manufacture: they are often small mass-produced items or

miniatures of daily objects that are easily transported and deposited in shrines, like clay tokens with impressions of Catholic saints, Buddhist ceramic flasks for small amounts of liquid, and Greek metal anthropomorphic figurines.

Another important material correlation of pilgrimage is the presence of artifacts left by people from different areas, such as ceramics and exotic stone objects that represent the various regional identities and pilgrims' places of origin (Bauer and Stanish 2001; Silverman 1993). These artifacts may represent offerings brought from afar to the pilgrimage site, trade items, or the belongings of foreign pilgrims themselves. Inscriptions and iconography are also crucial for identifying pilgrimage archaeologically, as they provide clues to the identity of ritual participants or local deities, the nature and functions of sites, and the behaviors of pilgrims (Dillon 1997; Stone 1995; Vikan 2010). As discussed previously, footprints and handprints found in art and on artifacts are often associated with pilgrimage (Barnes and Branfoot 2006; Proser 2010). Handprints and animal paintings in Paleolithic caves, for instance, indicate that pilgrims touched shrines during rites of communication with the "masters of the animals" or "earth lords." Textiles, maps, carvings, and paintings may also depict travelers, who may be shown as pilgrims of various social statuses and ethnicities (Adair 1978; see fig. 1.4). Stupas and monumental Buddha images in caves signal pilgrimage destinations in Asia (Proser 2010), as do the texts and images in stone carvings that obviously mark Hindu pilgrimage shrines (Singh 2002). Archaeological context is important since we expect to find many of the aforementioned material correlates in shrine deposits. In some cases, secular items and architectural features, such as domestic pottery and food storage items, can be associated with pilgrimage sites, and they can be identified as pilgrimage artifacts if found with shrines, votive offerings, temporary shelter, and pilgrimage iconography.

From the perspective of the longue durée, researchers have utilized archaeological, historical, and ethnographic information to contribute to the study of pilgrimage by showing the punctuated developments and changes in the use and importance of shrines and ritual landscapes. For instance, regional multiethnic and domestic economies were integrated at early shrines and up to the present in the Near East (McCorriston 2011), cities eventually grew around or near pilgrimage sites in Europe and South America (Silverman 1994), and expanding states have incorporated important, long-standing ritual landscapes to legitimize elite authority and rule

over subject foreign provinces in ancient Andean civilizations (Bauer and Stanish 2001).

Pilgrimage routes and associated shrines have also been studied to better our understanding of pilgrimage behavior in ritual landscapes (Candy 2009). For instance, Sheets (2011) recovered material evidence for pilgrimage and community identity over a long period in the Arenal area in Costa Rica. Over the centuries, ancient peoples in the region maintained a linear pilgrimage route along an entrenched path from the village to the community cemetery. The route accommodated processions of village members, who made their way across a considerable distance (about eleven kilometers) through a complex ritual landscape, including a prominent hill with stone platforms (Sheets 2011:430) and the path itself, to the cemetery. At the cemetery people undertook processions, feasting, burial rites, and construction projects, indicating that they spent some time there (Sheets 2011:428; Sheets and Sever 1991:64). What is fascinating about this instance of pilgrimage is that community members preserved the same path to the place of their ancestors and their communal lands over a long period, even after several volcanic eruptions resulted in the periodic covering and abandonment of this formal route to the cemetery. Clearly, pilgrimage, ritual landscapes, ancestral places, social identity, and territory were closely intertwined (Bravo Marentes 1994).

Finally, archaeologists have shown for long chronological sequences that the timing of pilgrimages and appeals to ancestors and divine forces to achieve balance has been concentrated in moments of social disruption, such as transformations in interregional economies, political upheaval, and the Spanish conquest in the Maya region (Hammond and Bobo 1994; Walker 1990). It is in the context of cosmic balance, the continuation of the world order, and the collective good, particularly during times of crises, that pilgrimage in Mesoamerica stands out.

PILGRIMAGE IN MESOAMERICA

Indigenous people undertook pilgrimages to newly established Catholic shrines in Mesoamerica immediately following the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century (Bremer 2001; Garma Navarro and Shadow 1994; Kubler 1984, 1985; Rodríguez-Shadow and Shadow 2000; Turner and Turner 1978). However, distinctive native rites at these shrines and the continuous utilization of Mesoamerican ritual landscapes indicate that pilgrimage in the

region was not European in origin (Broda 2001; Girard 1995; Good Eshelman 2001; Sandstrom 2005; Turner and Turner 1978; Zeitlan 2008). In fact, archaeological and historical data demonstrate that preconquest Mesoamerican pilgrimages were important in native religions, especially during the Late Postclassic period (Martínez Marín 1972). For instance, Aztec nobles built pilgrimage shrines at Mount Tlaloc and Tetzcotzingo in central Mexico, and the Spanish described the rites there (Townsend 1982). Aztecs constructed a temple with a processional ramp on the mountain of Tetzcotzingo, and they created aqueducts to channel springwater from the summit down to baths and garden terraces in the foothills. They carved depictions of Aztec deities and ancestors in what they viewed as living bedrock. Pilgrimage shrines like Tetzcotzingo were maintained by Aztec elites, but commoners witnessed the rituals at the shrines or from afar, as the processions, pomp, and splendor (including music, colorful clothing and banners, and ritual fires) could be seen from a distance.

Freidel (1981:378), who has researched Maya interregional ports of trade and pilgrimage sites at Cozumel Island in Yucatán, views Mesoamerican pilgrimage in a comparative context as the scheduled, periodic circulation of large numbers of people from broad cultural and geographical backgrounds. He believes that pilgrimage is associated with universalizing religions, like those of Mesoamerica and that pilgrimage can be a voluntary act of personal devotion, such as ancestor worship and healing ceremonies, or something larger, as at Cozumel, such as visiting an oracle to request success in commerce (1981:379). Furthermore, he states that Mesoamerican pilgrimage is important for the maintenance of local political power and regionally important centers because it attracts people for ritual and trade. Freidel (1981:378–82) proposes that ancient Maya centers were nodes in pilgrimage and fair networks. In his model, Maya elites held rituals to honor community deities at their political centers, which attracted pilgrims who participated in a universal religion. Fairs at politico-religious centers simultaneously facilitated the exchange of goods among the local populace and pilgrims (see also Wells and Nelson 2007). Through scheduled pilgrimage fairs, Maya populations moved about the landscape to obtain local resources and witness rituals. By organizing the religious events, Maya elites controlled the flow of goods, taxed the participants, and legitimated their status through contact with spiritual forces. Maya pilgrimages were oriented to central places and core religious and economic institutions (Freidel 1981:379). The centers contained shrines dedicated to community gods and ancestors, and people

arriving to the sites were integrated through kinship and rituals at household ancestor shrines. However, people from other polities and ethnic groups could have taken part in the exchange and ritual due to the socially integrating function of pilgrimage to regional shrines (Freidel 1975).

Freidel's model is important for our examination of pilgrimage in that elites may have attracted pilgrims to their centers and socially integrated them into the community by organizing rituals for local deities and ancestors. Recent evidence from Classic Maya inscriptions points to the importance of local deities linked to Maya centers and their temples, ruling lineages, and perhaps even Maya rulers themselves (Stuart 2005:159–61). Maya pilgrims could have traveled to the centers along causeways and roads (fig. 2.5) to witness the rituals in plazas near the temples where the exchange of goods at pilgrimage fairs could have taken place. The rituals at the shrines and the exchange of goods would have brought people from distant places to the sites where they were integrated socially, religiously, and economically. The pilgrimage rituals and fairs were central to maintaining Maya communities and reinforcing elite status, and the Maya populace was quite mobile, moving from site to site based on the political fortunes of rulers and their abilities to communicate with supernatural forces to ensure good harvests and the flow of goods. Thus, important pilgrimage shrines and successful elite rituals encouraged people to settle at or return to the sites, providing support and power for local elites.

Ringle and colleagues (1998) argue that pilgrimages to sites throughout Mesoamerica between the Late Classic and Postclassic periods led to the spread of the cult of Quetzalcoatl. The expansion of beliefs related to Quetzalcoatl resulted in the diffusion of feathered serpent imagery, the increased importance of sacrifice and war, and the architecture and artifacts belonging to the cult. Through a set of international symbols, foreign pilgrims could communicate their shared beliefs and form military alliances while suppressing local elite aggrandizement (Ringle et al. 1998:209–10). Pilgrimages involved trade between the sites participating in the cult, and the recovery of many jades symbolizing Quetzalcoatl and fertility in the Sacred Cenote at Chichen Itza in Yucatán, which resemble jades from other Mesoamerican sites, is viewed as direct evidence of pilgrimage and the spread of the Quetzalcoatl cult and elite ideologies (Ringle et al. 1998:203–7). Pilgrimage was, therefore, important for the movement of people across political boundaries, transmission of ideas, forging of political allegiances, and combining of political and religious messages in the creation of an elite order (Ringle et al. 1998:227).

Figure 2.5. Maya pilgrim road under an archway or portal at the entrance to Kabah, Yucatán, Mexico.

Patel (2005, 2009) has developed alternative models of Mesoamerican pilgrimage that emphasize religion, ritual landscapes, and social interaction. In this perspective, pilgrimage did not always follow military expansion and trade, but it was important for social and economic intercourse. Pilgrimage was a politically neutral practice with a religious base, focused on ritual landscapes rather than militarism (Patel 2009:217). Mesoamerican cultures carried out pilgrimages to ritual landscapes to take part in fertility rites and the preservation of world order, along with visiting oracles for pronouncements regarding alliances and religious observances, mediating disputes, and learning the outcomes of war. Women's involvement in pilgrimage rituals at oracular shrines may have given them power in religious and political life in Mesoamerican societies (Patel 2009:217). Pilgrimage allowed for interregional interaction and communication through the development of international iconography and shared ritual, particularly during the Late Postclassic period. Additionally, the preservation of pilgrimage rites in ritual landscapes away from settlements enabled indigenous people to resist Spanish rule and religious conversion while continuing native religious practices (Patel 2009:212–16).

Mesoamerican people perceive pilgrimage as a principal means of

interaction with the deities and divine forces that are important for people's existence (Sandstrom 2005). The deities can be best contacted at their homes, which are often extraordinary features in the landscape found away from human settlements (Molesky-Poz 2006). The pilgrimage sanctuaries in ritual landscapes are communicating places where deities can be spoken to and appeased and function much like the communicating objects of Maya stelae, statuary, figurines, and ancestors' skeletal remains (Astor-Aguilera 2010). The idea of shrines as communicating places explains why deity images or representations of gods, such as modeled incense burners and paper figurines, are taken to ritual landscapes so that people can interact with these divine beings. And in fact, Mesoamerican deities and spiritual essences also go on pilgrimages and visit people's houses, temples, fields, altars, and settlements (Harvey 1991:97; Konrad 1991:135; Straub 1991). Lacandon Maya gods, for instance, can be found simultaneously in the sky, forest, their houses (caves, ruins, etc.), and in god pots in human settlements (Boremanse 1999:241).

Today, pilgrimages in Mesoamerica are undertaken by individuals, usually male religious specialists or household heads (Vogt 1981); by men alone (Stanzione 2007); or by large groups, including males and females of different ages (Good Eshelman 2009). In communities in central Mexico, several hundred to several thousand people have participated in single pilgrimages (Grigsby 1986:163; Harvey 1991:98; Rodríguez-Shadow and Shadow 2000; Sandstrom 2005). The distances covered in Mesoamerican pilgrimages range from a few hours' travel from a settlement (Vogt 1981) to a journey of several days (Myerhoff 1994), depending on the goal of the pilgrimage and the importance of the shrine to be visited. Pilgrimages in this culture area can be organized according to calendars, such as for agricultural purposes at the start of the rainy season, or they can be undertaken when needed, such as to petition deities for health, success in commerce, the right amounts of rain, or abundant crops.

Culturally Important Features

Pilgrimage sites in Mesoamerican ritual landscapes are not limited to a few select sanctified shrines, as seen in other religions, and there are many reasons for the infinite number of pilgrimage shrines in this culture area. Mesoamerican ritual landscapes are connected to community gods and ancestors, and the numerous shrines in the landscape have allowed people

to visit the houses of myriad divine beings. Specific spiritual essences resided in certain places in the landscape, such as rain gods on Mount Tlaloc in central Mexico and Ix Chel on Cozumel Island (Martínez Marín 1972). Some sites were more important on a regional, cross-cultural level, such as Chalma, Cholula, Esquipulas, and Isla de Sacrificios (see the following discussion), but frequently people visited local shrines closer to their settlements to communicate with spiritual forces. Additionally, ritual landscapes housed local tutelary deities, such as lineage gods and local spiritual forces linked to nature. The landscapes themselves are animate, requiring nourishment through ceremonial offerings.

Mesoamerican ritual landscapes are home to gods who can be beneficial to the welfare of humans, but the resident gods can also be harmful, causing disease, death, drought, floods, and crop failure (Sandstrom 2005). Therefore, pilgrims have to approach ritual landscapes with caution and under the guidance of knowledgeable persons, who are often elders or ritual specialists, so that the pilgrims will not be harmed. Elites and male religious specialists frequently control these powerful roles. Also, pilgrims must be ritually purified by abstaining from sex and certain foods and by following specific behavioral patterns (Myerhoff 1994). The procession to a pilgrimage destination away from human settlements allows people to prepare themselves for interacting with the spiritual essences by making themselves humble, positive thinking, and alert (Girard 1995). People visit the homes of deities at ritual landscapes in Mesoamerica to provide food offerings, prayer, and music. The pilgrimages, the rituals at these places, and the offerings and prayers are part of the pact, covenant, or what Mesoamerican people call "obligations" that they have with deities (Monaghan 1995, 2000; Sandstrom 2005). The ritual obligations fulfilled through pilgrimage allow people to receive the things they need on a constant basis from divine forces, including rain, crops, and health (Grigsby 1986; Kubler 1984). In turn, the deities receive essential sustenance, reverence, entertainment, and social interaction from people. Thus, pilgrimage is part of everyday life and is crucial for maintaining the world order in Mesoamerica.

Mesoamerican people view pilgrimages as cycles of movement and disappearance/reappearance as seen on earth and in the heavens. For instance, the Yucatec Maya call pilgrims *u shimbal ek'ob* or "movements of the stars" (Konrad 1991:123). Processions, veneration of gods and ancestors, and good character are imbued with sacredness or spiritual force (*k'ul* and *k'uyen*) for the Yucatec Maya, as is the path of the sun (Astor-Aguilera 2010:21), all of

which are associated with pilgrimage. Pilgrimage, particularly among Maya people, is an earthly practice that mimics the cyclical travels of astral bodies and spiritual essences as they move through the thirteen layers of the upper world and nine layers of the underworld of the cosmos (Konrad 1991). People travel on roads, ritual walkways, or *sacbes* ("white roads" in Mayan languages), much like deities travel along the Milky Way (a white road in the sky; Konrad 1991:135).

In a pioneering study of Mesoamerican pilgrimage, Martínez Marín (1972:161) states that pilgrimage shrines, including rivers, lakes, springs, and especially mountains and their caves, were either community focused or of regional, cross-cultural importance. He further points out that spiritual essences residing in these places entered into all aspects of people's lives and were tutelary and oracular in nature. Thus, people had to travel to their abodes to contact the spiritual essences and make offerings to get the things that they wanted, to seek protection, and to maintain cosmic balance and world order. Petitioning for the conditions necessary for good harvests, such as adequate rainfall and sunshine, and the prevention of natural catastrophes was also central to Mesoamerican pilgrimages. Therefore, many shrines were dedicated to water and earth deities (Martínez Marín 1972:162). While pilgrimages could be carried out for individual reasons, they were largely important for collaborating with deities to sustain human society and the cosmos for the collective good. Individuals did make pilgrimages, but rituals at shrines were often attended by many people who were led by religious specialists. Besides the religious importance of pilgrimages, markets and trade were also popular during these ritual events (Martínez Marín 1972:172).

Kubler (1984, 1985) and others compare Mesoamerican and Old World pilgrimages to elucidate their similarities and differences, which figure prominently in this study. Kubler (1984:11) states that pilgrimage generally involves journey and endeavor. In pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, journey and endeavor were not only individual matters, as he claims for Old World pilgrimage, but they were part of a collective responsibility to maintain cosmic balance in the face of constant supernatural pressure toward dissolution (Kubler 1984:11). Good Eshelman (2009) demonstrates that the collective nature of contemporary pilgrimage in Guerrero, Mexico, allows people to experience physical hardships, changing landscapes, and ceremonies together. These experiences help preserve beliefs, knowledge, and comprehension of a living landscape, which are transmitted to other members of society through descriptions of the pilgrimage event. Pilgrimages in

Mesoamerica have often served political ends. Elites organized pilgrimages and processions, and they were undertaken to affirm community members' different social ranks and statuses (Orr 2001). Pilgrimage rites also reinforced community identity and were important for demarcating territorial boundaries (Orr 2001:55–56). Pilgrimages in contemporary Oaxaca and Guerrero may be carried out during times of community crises, droughts in particular (Orr 2001:56–57; Sandstrom 2005). Here, too, indigenous pilgrimage to mountaintops involved ceremonies for agricultural fecundity and the control of rain, as in the rest of Mesoamerica. Pilgrims in Mesoamerica also frequently carry banners representing religious and political groups from specific communities (Alvarado Solís 2008).

Ethnographic Insights

One of the most studied pilgrimages in Mesoamerica is the Huichol journey from west Mexico to the desert of San Luis Potosí in east Mexico and back home again (Liffman 2011; Myerhoff 1994; Schaefer and Furst 1996). The Huichol pilgrimage covers several hundred miles during which participants stop at ritual landscapes to perform ceremonies, play music and dance, and leave votive offerings to the gods and ancestors in ancestral places (Myerhoff 1994:142–46). The ritual landscapes include hilltops, springs, and desert expanses near hills. These landscapes represent the places where the Huichol ancestral deities stopped on their journey to the desert homeland and where they can be communicated with today. Upon arriving in the desert, Huichol pilgrims exchange votive offerings and prayer for sacred peyote, which they remove from the landscape and take home for agricultural and hunting rituals. The peyote as sacred material is important for communicating with gods, receiving divine blessings, reinforcing Huichol identity, and continuing the people's well-being. The votive offerings include wood and clay figurines in the shapes of animals and humans, small ceremonial arrows, decorated gourd bowls, and woven disks (*nierika* in Huichol) that represent portals, eyes, or faces and allow religious specialists to see and communicate with divine beings (Alcocer and Neurath 2007). Religious specialists, who are mostly men, lead Huichol pilgrimages because of their knowledge of the pilgrimage ceremonies and ritual landscapes on the route to the desert homeland, in addition to having the ability to intercede with supernatural forces on behalf of the pilgrims. Some religious specialists are women,

but women mainly use their knowledge and skills to prepare the ceremonial foods and offerings for the pilgrimage rites.

Huichol people also make regular pilgrimages to ritual landscapes that are close to where they live in west Mexico and include mountains, caves, springs, lakes, cliffs, boulders, rivers, islands, and the shore of the Pacific Ocean (Liffman 2011; Schaefer and Furst 1996). Deities associated with water, earth, animals, ancestors, and the sun manifest themselves at these landscape abodes, which are imbued with spiritual energy and life (Schaefer and Furst 1996:12). At these ritual places, Huichol people pray; play music with flutes, rasps, and tinklers; burn incense; and leave votive offerings to acquire favors from or show gratitude to the gods. They also touch or walk in a circle in bare feet at these places to communicate with the gods found there (Eger Valadez 2010:87). Since ceremonial objects are left in ritual landscapes once they have fulfilled their purpose, the places always remain symbolically significant. One Huichol pilgrimage destination is a cliff with rock art found on the way to the ocean. According to Huichol religious specialists, rock art designs showing lines represent steps through the layers of the cosmos that the sun and other gods ascend as they reach the zenith position in the sky (Furst and Scott 1975).

Huichol people participate in pilgrimages for various reasons, such as training for neophyte religious specialists, cementing social ties, and healing sick people and animals. They also carry out pilgrimages to seek the guidance of spiritual forces, satisfy ancestral deities who need offerings and prayer, acquire sacred peyote for agricultural rituals, and, most of all, reaffirm their native beliefs and identity as Huichol. Through pilgrimages to and rituals at their sacred shrines in the landscape, Huichols create bonds between themselves and the divine beings living there, reaffirm kinship ties, and strengthen their roots in their physical and symbolic territory (Liffman 2011:13–14). The connections between Huichol people and their land are consecrated since the treks link household hearths, family shrines, and ritual enclosures in their communities. Furthermore, the pilgrimages to ritual landscapes involve both family and community members (Liffman 2011:5–6, 26–27, 63–64, 103–4), and the pilgrims use community, lineage, and personal symbols at the shrines to link people and lineage deities to the landscape. The landscape shrines represent places from which ancestral deities emerged onto the earth; thus, Huichol visits to and rituals at these places acknowledge their religious beliefs, kinship ties, and claims to places and territory. The rites also help maintain balance in the cosmos.

In another case, the contemporary Nahua people of Veracruz make pilgrimages to sacred caves on a distant ritual mountain—a single, extinct volcanic peak rising from a plain—to petition the deities for rain during drought (Sandstrom 2005). The mountain caves are the homes of water, storm, and fish gods, and Nahuas believe that these beings must be given offerings and prayer so that they will not be angry and will continuously provide important things to people, such as rain, corn, riches, and the soul energies that are kept inside these caves. The rituals help keep a balance between the human, natural, and supernatural worlds and even restore the natural world by bringing rain and increasing crop fertility. Large numbers of community members participate in the preparations for the rites and in the pilgrimage itself. During the pilgrimage, participants leave offerings to the water spirit in springs along the way, but the main destination, the ritual mountain abode of this deity, must be reached and ascended for the pilgrimage to be complete. Local people from the town at the base of the mountain maintain quarters and an altar for pilgrims to leave offerings before their ascent. The climb is laborious, and people stop to leave offerings; however, the main offerings are placed in a cave entrance on the mountain's side and on an altar on its summit.

As part of their pilgrimage rites, Nahua religious specialists construct elaborate altars, offer sacrifices, throw down objects for divination, gaze into crystals, circumambulate ritual sites, chant, play music and dance, and leave offerings (Sandstrom 2005:36). They create large quantities of anthropomorphic paper figurines representing the spirits—aspects of the earth, water, and clouds—and many other beings (Sandstrom 2005:44). These figures are either offerings to the spirits or they receive offerings as agents and representations of the gods. During Nahua pilgrimages to take part in rain ceremonies at a ritual cave in Guerrero, people remove earth from the cave walls and take it back to their cornfields to fertilize them with the water and powerful spiritual essences found within (Villela 2009:334). Other ritual landscapes used in contemporary Nahua pilgrimages include springs, plains, ruins, and lakes on mountains, and the ritual places are ranked in importance by religious specialists, who decide when they should be visited and what offerings should be given there and to which deity. Mountains with caves are among the most ritually important of all places, and the spirits of these places also protect people living nearby. People identify strongly with these places, where cosmic forces and ancestors are found, because the landscapes are seen as alive (Sandstrom 2005:37, 43). Nahuas describe the animate earth and

its features as a large body, with blood (water), bones (rocks), and flesh (earth), which are nourished through people's rituals (Sandstrom 2005:42). They name their communities and households after the striking geographical features that contain powerful spiritual forces.

Historic Descriptions

Interaction at the homes of the gods for the maintenance of the covenants between people and deities—as well as identity and group cohesion—has always driven pilgrimages to ritual landscapes in Mesoamerica (see fig. 1.7). According to historic sources, people made pilgrimages to shrines of deities pertaining to their lineages and ethnic groups. Mixtec people from Oaxaca, Mexico, for instance, traveled to the mountaintop shrine of Chalcatongo to revere ancestral god-kings buried there (Kubler 1984:13). They also asked ancestors to communicate with spiritual forces on their behalf. Additionally, Mesoamerican ruling elites made pilgrimages to important places to reinforce their exalted status. At the ritual sites, elites received badges of office, body ornamentation, and providence for rulership. Examples include the pilgrimages of the Mixtec elites of Oaxaca and Maya nobles further to the south to the Toltec capital of Tula in central Mexico to receive turquoise or jade nose plugs before they returned home to claim their thrones.

Preconquest Mesoamerican migrations were called pilgrimages (*peregrinaciones*) in postconquest histories (Martínez Marín 1972) since the migrants' journeys were mandated by deities and they visited ritual places before they reached their homelands. However, in earlier works words such as *arrival*, *migration*, *travel*, *procession*, and *journey* appear more frequently (Durán 1994), and as discussed previously, these terms more closely describe native concepts of pilgrimage in Mesoamerica and elsewhere. Spanish sources mention the continuities in the behaviors, goals, and sites associated with indigenous pilgrimages in Mesoamerica. For example, pilgrimage to ritual springs and rivers was common, and many shrines with springs and water holes were located near mountains, where indigenous pilgrims from distant places offered sacrifices. These ritual landscapes drew pilgrims wishing to contact earth deities. During seasonal rites to Chalchiuhtlicue (an Aztec deity associated with water and earth), for instance, pilgrims from across central Mexico went to various cave, river, and lake shrines to deposit figurines, ceramics, and jewels to please the resident god (Martínez Marín 1972:165). On pilgrimages to caves and mountaintops for rituals related to

rain, central Mexican lords and commoners presented incense, rubber, paper, food, bowls, precious stones, jewels, gourds, toys (*juguetes*, perhaps figurines or miniature objects), and sacrificial children to resident deities (Martínez Marín 1972:166). People also made symbolic pilgrimages to mythical places, such as ancestral homelands and lands of gods, through trances and hallucinogens.

One major indigenous pilgrimage shrine at a significant ritual landscape is Chalma (fig. 2.6), located near the impressive Aztec ritual cliff site of Malinalco in central Mexico. The Chalma shrine consists of picturesque mountains containing caves and springs where pilgrims from all over Mesoamerica come to worship ancestral gods and deities related to earth, water, and human health and fertility (Hobgood 1964; Rodríguez-Shadow and Shadow 2000). People bathed in the healing waters of Chalma (fig. 2.7), left offerings, and sacrificed animals and children for the water, storm, and earth deity called Tlaloc (Hobgood 1964:48; Martínez Marín 1972:168), who was actually contacted at numerous abodes across Mesoamerica, including Mount Tlaloc. Today, pilgrims still bathe in and drink the waters of Chalma, and they leave offerings of maize and votive figures to fight sickness and acquire goods and hang small bundles of umbilical cords in trees so that their children will grow up healthy (Hobgood 1964).

The name *Chalma* was perhaps derived from Nahuatl terms meaning the "precious [deity] hand" or "precious thing from the deity's hand" (Rodríguez-Shadow and Shadow 2000:28), referring to the creation of the beautiful landscapes at the shrine by the touch of native gods and their powers of healing through touch. In addition to Tlaloc, the site was a place of worship of other Aztec patron deities at caves, cliffs, hills, and springs (fig. 2.8), such as Huitzilopochtli and Tetzcatlipoca. One Aztec deity associated with springs at Chalma, and who was an assistant of the rain god Tlaloc, was called Atlahua ("Owner of the Waters"; Hobgood 1964:21–27). This deity was also a hunter god termed "he of the sandals of penance" (i.e., a pilgrim), who represented what Mesoamerican people do while on pilgrimage: walk, hunt, visit shrines, perform penance, and bathe in the ritual cleansing and healing waters. Another Aztec deity associated with Chalma and its caves was called Ostocteotl, "Cave God/Essence," who was associated with the rain god Tlaloc and also Tetzcatlipoca, a god linked to war and caves (Rodríguez-Shadow and Shadow 2000:37–41). These and other gods often accompanied people on pilgrimages in central Mexico. On a god's festival day, or if people needed the deity's assistance, they would take images of the gods from the

Figure 2.6. Pilgrims at the shrine of Chalma, Mexico. Note mountains and cliffs containing caves and springs (from the Hal Box and Logan Wagner Collection of Mexican Architecture and Urban Design. Courtesy the School of Architecture Visual Resources Collection, The University of Texas at Austin; image number 90-10830).

temples to shrines at caves or hills, offer sacrifices to the gods, and then return to the temples with the god images (Hobgood 1964:41–42).

As described by the Spanish in central Mexico, native priests would go before the rainy season every year to the tops of ritual mountains, where rain deities dwelled (fig. 2.9), to give offerings of incense, food, and small children in propitiation of the gods of the springs, caves, and pools scattered throughout the land (Hobgood 1964:27). Spanish chroniclers describe presentations of offerings, the burning of incense to ritual images, and child sacrifice by Aztec elites to rain deities who lived on the summit of Mount Tlaloc (Tlalocatepetl), which was located about twenty miles east of the capital of Tenochtitlan in the Sierra Tlalocan (Martínez Marín 1972:163; Townsend 1982, 1992). On the mountaintops and in the caves and springs, the Aztec lords constructed fine shrines (Martínez Marín 1972:165–67, 171), and indigenous people in central Mexico believed that storms, lightning, hail, and rain originated at the mountaintop shrine where the water, storm, and earth god Tlaloc resided (Martínez Marín 1972:163–64). A shrine made up of a plaza with an enclosed temple built of stone and wood that housed a large stone image of Tlaloc, in addition to

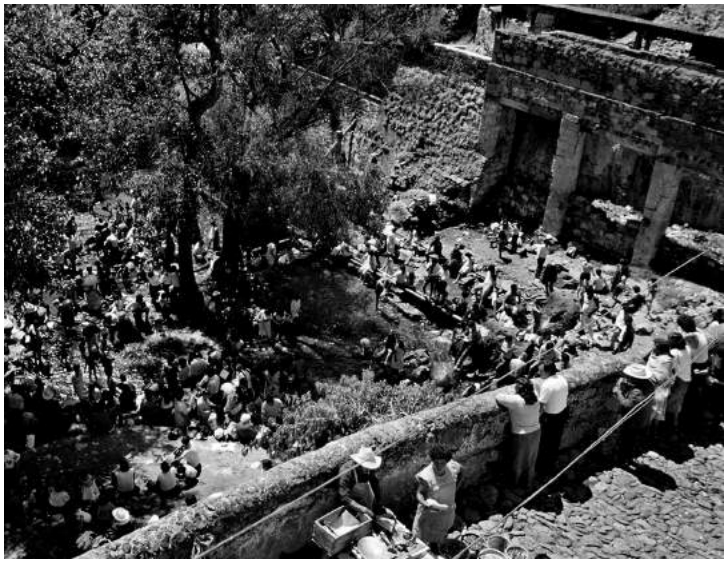

Figure 2.7. Pilgrims bathe in the curing waters from springs (center) at the shrine of Chalma, Mexico (from the Hal Box and Logan Wagner Collection of Mexican Architecture and Urban Design. Courtesy the School of Architecture Visual Resources Collection, The University of Texas at Austin; image number 89-2366).

other deities representing smaller mountains nearby, was constructed on the mountain's leveled summit. Boulders and a cavelike hole were also noted at this shrine. A walkway with stone retaining walls guided pilgrims to the temple, and during major rituals on the mountain, buildings and roofs were fashioned on its slopes to shelter visiting lords from distant lands. In the rituals, Aztec priests sacrificed a child and smeared the blood on the Tlaloc image as an offering for the continuation of the proper amount of rain. Too much rain ruined crops and flooded settlements; too little led to drought. Pilgrims to Mount Tlaloc brought sacred water back to people at home, and they bathed in the waters at the shrines to wash away sickness sent by the gods and to purify themselves from sin (Hobgood 1964:25).

According to Aztec mythology, priests and sorcerers completed symbolic pilgrimages to Aztlan, the place of origin of the Aztecs and other central Mexican peoples, to give offerings to and consult with ancestral deities living there (Elzey 1991). Aztlan was thought to be an island containing a mountain called Coatepetl from which the ancestors journeyed to create the Aztec cities of central Mexico (fig. 2.10). Aztlan, the paradisiacal ancestral place

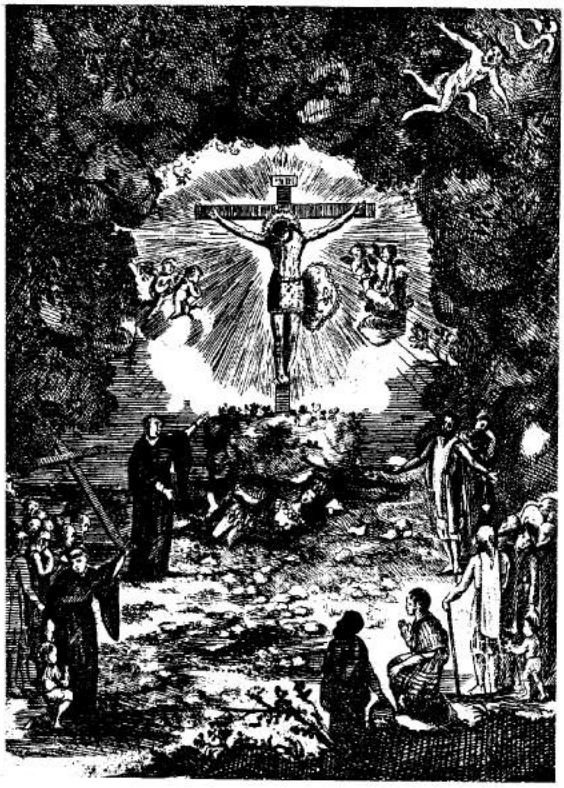

Figure 2.8. The apparition of Christ above pilgrims at the cave shrine of Chalma, Mexico. Note smashed pre-Columbian statuary and offerings near the altar (after Sardo 1810).

combining a lake, an island, springs, a hollow mountain with caves, and rich terrestrial and aquatic resources was the exemplary Aztec *altepetl*, or "water mountain" (community), in Nahuatl. This place was associated with elite lineages, patron gods, immortality, truth, and purity. The Aztec Tenochtitlan stood for Aztlan and the ideal altepetl since it was an island in Lake Tetzcoco with the artificial mountain of the Great Temple as Coatepetl, in addition to being a community in a land of abundance that attracted people from across the Aztec realm. When the Aztec religious specialists made the mythical journey to Aztlan, they learned about the history and future of the Aztec people from the divine ancestral beings living there. They moved up and down the ritual mountain of Culhuacan (another mythical mountain

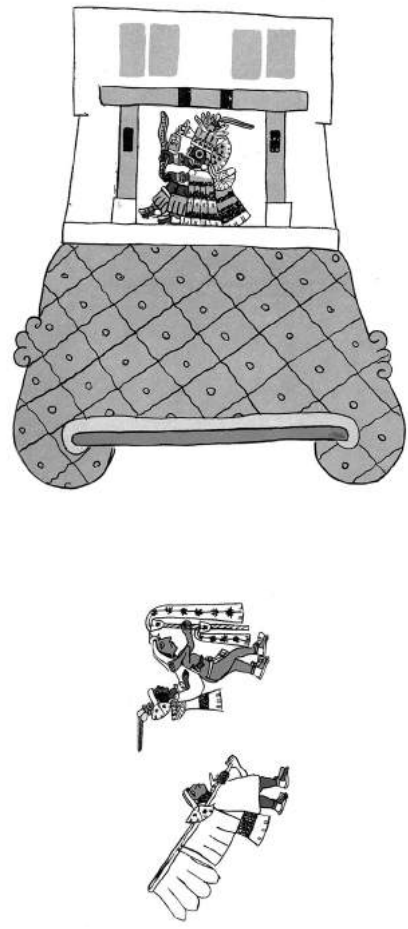

Figure 2.9. Aztec pilgrims ascend Mount Tlaloc, central Mexico, carrying a child for sacrifice. Note the temple on the level mountain summit housing the rain deity Tlaloc, who holds a lightning bolt (Codex Barbonicus, p. 25).

associated with Aztlan) and grew older as they ascended and then younger as they descended. Similarly, Aztec souls descended from the heavens to be born and then moved down to Mictlan after death. Aztec rulers were believed to travel to the place of origin to ascend the main temple and participate in coronation ceremonies and then descend to return to govern their communities. Importantly, journeys to ritual places across the landscape were related to the origins, history, territory, and destiny of communities in Aztec thought, whereas vertical movement was connected to the origins and transformation of the individual (Elzey 1991:126).

The city of Cholula, in Puebla, holds one of the largest pyramids in the New World and is still a major indigenous pilgrimage shrine. Cholula rests

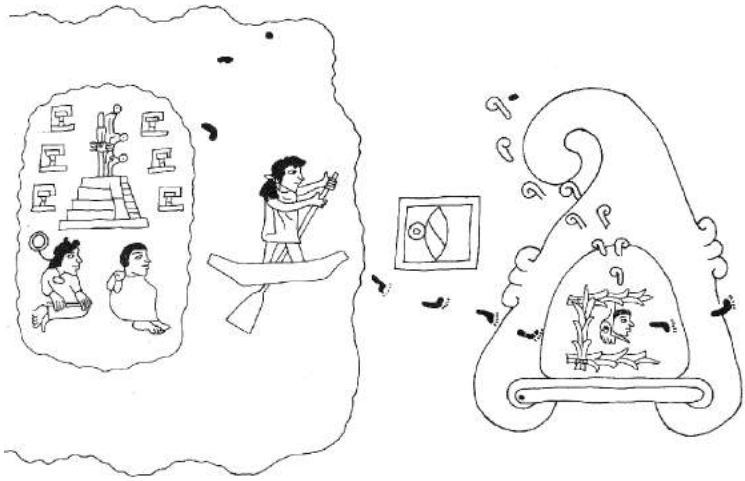

Figure 2.10. Aztec ancestors leave the island of Aztlan to visit the Chicomoztoc cave and communicate with an ancestral oracle (Huitzilopochtli) in the curved mountain of Culhuacan. Notice the pilgrim footprints and oracle speech scrolls at the cave (drawing by Paulina Makuch after the Tira de Peregrinación, Codex Boturini, illustration 1).

on a plain near two of the highest volcanoes in central Mexico, and its inhabitants raised its great pyramid over a natural spring. At the time of the Spanish conquest, the city was also located on the boundaries of several powerful polities, who periodically met at this ritual site. Indigenous informants told Spanish chroniclers that Cholula was a principal pilgrimage shrine for the god Quetzalcoatl, a deity with rain and fertility attributes (Carrasco and Sessions 2007; McCafferty 2001; Ringle et al. 1998:214). The temples at this center even surpassed the temples of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan in ritual importance, and people from across Mesoamerica would arrive at the shrine to pray, make offerings, and request favors from divine beings (Martínez Marín 1972:170). Archaeologists have uncovered evidence of the presence of different cultures at the site, as seen in its art, architecture, artifacts, and human burials (McCafferty 2001). Today, a Catholic church rests on the tall ruined pyramid at Cholula, and people visit this timeless ritual place to procure healing waters from the spring. It is important to note that Spanish priests built churches on native pilgrimage shrines across Mesoamerica to attract native populations to these sanctuaries and their associated fairs, festivals, and markets (figs. 2.11 and 2.12).

Figure 2.11. Catholic church on a Maya ritual hill, San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico.

Archaeology and Iconography

Numerous archaeological sites across Mesoamerica reflect the antiquity and importance of pilgrimage, yet the social functions of indigenous pilgrimage to ritual landscapes have not been completely explored. Pilgrimage was consistently symbolized in Postclassic and historic Mesoamerican painted books as dark footprints leading to landscape shrines, such as caves and mountains, and depictions of people performing rituals at these locales (Weaver and Adams Weaver 2007; Williams 2009). Footprints also appear in rock art at ritual landscapes in Mesoamerica and mark pilgrimage destinations (Pincemin Deliberos 1999:90–91). As a case in point, footprints in white paint occur alongside handprints on a rock art panel at the base of the Dani Guiati mountain in Oaxaca (Strecker 1982:51), and the toes point up the mountain as if to indicate the pilgrims' direction of travel. Pilgrimages have not been securely identified in pre-Columbian iconography, yet murals depicting processions of people in ceremonial attire over footprints may show pilgrimages to Teotihuacan (fig. 2.13; Pasztory 1997:200–205; Paulinyi 2009:187, fig. 18; Vela 2005) and Monte Alban (Marcus 2009:98, fig. 22).

Figure 2.12. Spanish churches on ancient Maya platforms flanking a plaza and market, Chichicastenango, Guatemala.

The archaeological evidence indicates that Mesoamerican peoples made pilgrimages to ruins, sources of water, caves, hills, boulders, and islands to leave offerings for and communicate with deities in order to maintain balance in their natural and social worlds. For example, native people in Oaxaca have made pilgrimages to the ruins of Monte Alban, particularly the main plaza on the leveled hill where the site is located, for ceremonial purposes from Postclassic times to the present. Local indigenous Zapotec people associated this impressive archaeological site—with its large structures, monumental stone art, and panoramic vistas—with the ancestors, indigenous identity, and creation (Joyce 2009). The visitors placed offerings near abandoned structures to communicate with deities and ancestors (Joyce 2009:43), and some of the offerings included miniature ceramic vessels and incense

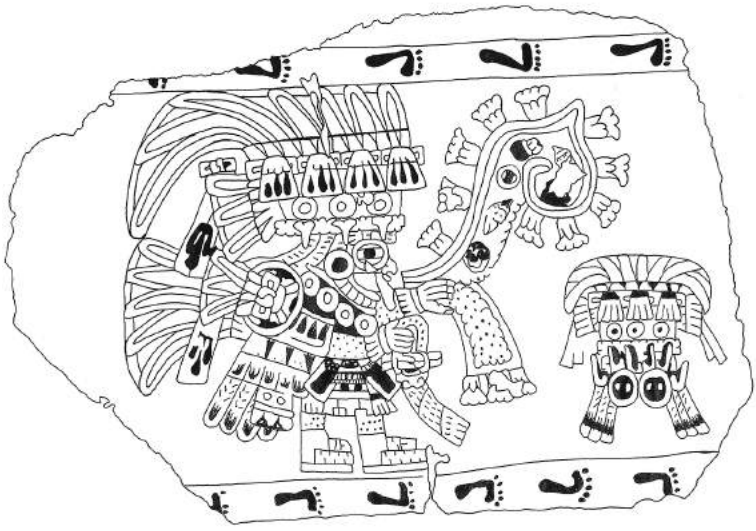

Figure 2.13. Teotihuacan mural showing footprints and elite male religious specialist carrying an incense bag and offerings (drawing by Paulina Makuch after Pasztory 1997:119, fig. 8.4).

burners similar to those left in local ritual landscapes (Joyce 2009:44). These items recall miniature objects left by pilgrims in other parts of the world (Vikan 2010:62–63, 70), including central Mexico (Grigsby 1986:162), west Mexico (Borhegyi 1964), and Yucatán (Andrews 1970). Postclassic Mixtec people also buried elite persons in elaborate tombs with rich burial furniture (Caso 1982; Joyce 2009:45). In this manner, elites become deities and ancestors at this important landscape shrine. In the Postclassic period, rituals at Monte Alban brought people from local polities together so that they could work out political issues and territorial boundaries (Joyce 2009:50n5). The site later became a ritual location for native Oaxacans resisting Spanish conversion to Catholicism, and their collective pilgrimages reinforced native identity (Joyce 2009:50–51).

The site of Chalcatzingo in Morelos, Mexico, with its dual mountains and sheer cliffs rising high above the plain, has been an important pilgrimage destination over the last three thousand years (fig. 2.14). Boulders are scattered around the mountains, springs are located close by, and a river courses through the plain near the site (Grove 1987a). Numerous overhangs, niches, caves, and rock-shelters dot the cliffs. Importantly, sources of rare kaolin clay are located in the region (Grove 1987c:383), and this fine white clay was

important for pottery making and perhaps for ritual ingestion, as described by early Spanish colonists in Mexico (Hobgood 1964:46). Early inhabitants at Chalcatzingo created large terraces leading up to the Chalcatzingo mountain, and these terraces supported residential structures, temples, elite palace-like buildings, plazas, and carved stone monuments. This area accommodated large numbers of residents and visitors. Over time, people constructed temples and shrines near the bases of the mountains, and they created a multitude of carved and painted artworks on the cliffs, caves, rock-shelters, and boulders. The designs depict animate caves, oracles within caves, clouds with raindrops, rain and wind serpents, animals, and handprints (fig. 2.15). The boulders also exhibit cupules and evidence of drilling and gouging from pilgrims removing sacred material and divine blessings (Hedges 2005). Artifacts, including obsidian, jade, and ceramics, indicate trade with and the presence of people from central Mexico, west Mexico, the Gulf Coast region, southern Mexico and Guatemala at this gateway center over a long period (Hirth 1978). The evidence of interregional interaction and a multiethnic presence at Chalcatzingo for thousands of years supports the interpretation of this site as a major pilgrimage center. Numerous small ceramic figurines found at the site may be pilgrimage-related artifacts (fig. 2.16; Grove 1987a:423), possibly offerings related to human healing, fertility, and ancestor worship. In addition, pottery foot stamps were recovered (see fig. 2.15), and these could symbolize travel or the arrival and presence of deities. The stamps may have been used to paint footprints on objects or on visitors themselves.

Another convincing archaeological example of ancient Mesoamerican pilgrimage is the domed hill and spring at El Manatí, located in a swampy plain in Veracruz, Mexico, which was an important ritual landscape for Olmec people from 1600 to 1000 B.C. The ritual landscape and material remains demonstrate that this special site was one of the earliest pilgrimage places in Mesoamerica. Archaeologists found no domestic architecture or artifacts (Ortiz and Rodríguez 2006); they only recovered offerings of jade axe blades and beads, bones of children, carved sandstone boulders, stone grinders, and plant bundles in the spring's waters. This ritual landscape was visited by pilgrims and ritual specialists who provided offerings to gods of mountains, rain, agricultural fertility, and freshwater (Ortiz and Rodríguez 2006:83–86). The stone grinders, axes, and plant remains may have been offerings for deities to provide plentiful harvests. The greenstone axes and beads were associated with rain and water because of their color, and axes

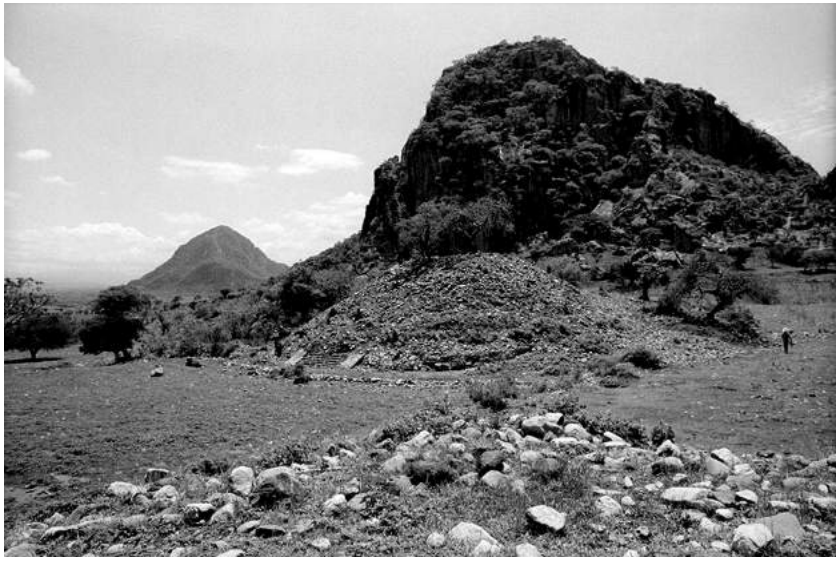

Figure 2.14. Temples near mountains with boulders and rock art, Chalcatzingo, Morelos, Mexico (photograph courtesy of the Ferguson-Royce Collection, Fine Arts Library, University of Texas–Austin; image number 10311369152).

and lightning bolts were also associated with one another in Mesoamerica (Ortiz and Rodríguez 2006:86–91). One polished jade celt depicts a carved human footprint (Escalante Gonzalbo 2005:20), probably representing the travel of Olmec pilgrims or the presence of spiritual essences (see fig. 2.3). The bones found in the spring were those of children who may have been sacrificed to rain gods, as in other parts of Mesoamerica. Additionally, an abstract design on a carved boulder in the spring may represent the Mesoamerican water serpent (Ortiz and Rodriguez 2006:77). This boulder and others exhibit "axe-sharpening marks" that are likely grooves made by pilgrims removing dust to take with them (Hedges 2005). Intriguingly, offerings of jade axes were embedded in lumps of white clay (Ortiz and Rodriquez 2006:90), possibly for healing rites in which worshippers consumed the therapeutic clays or made clay tokens. The pilgrims likely bathed in the spring's pools for cleansing and healing in addition to taking sacred water back to their settlements.

Crucial archaeological data on Mesoamerican pilgrimage can be found in caves (Brady 1989). Like springs and lakes, caves were viewed by ancient Mesoamericans as portals to spiritual realms and as homes of the gods. The

Figure 2.15. Handprints (drawing by Paulina Makuch after Apostolides 1987:190, fig. 12.41) and foot-shaped ceramic stamps from Chalcatzingo, Morelos, Mexico (drawing by Paulina Makuch after Grove 1987b:275, fig. 16.5; not to scale).

cave at the base of the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan served as a pilgrimage shrine in the ancient city. The multichambered cave at Teotihuacan recalls the seven-chambered cave at Chicomostoc within an artificial mountain, which was the place of origin for the Aztecs and other indigenous Mexican people (Heyden 1981). A spring once flowed inside the cave, enhancing the sacredness of this place and also making it a site for contacting earth deities in rain and agricultural rituals. The Teotihuacan cave contained fragments of basalt disks, probably mirror backings displaying imagery influenced by or manufactured in Veracruz, and an Aztec pottery fragment was found at the entrance (Heyden 1981:3–4). Foreign groups in this city included the Zapotec from Oaxaca, Maya from Guatemala and Yucatán, and people from Puebla and the Gulf Coast (Clayton 2005). The multiethnic wards at Teotihuacan, including Zapotec and Maya residences, support the interpretation of this city as a pilgrimage site. Also, the vast quantities of miniature anthropomorphic ceramic figurines found at the site may have been used in pilgrimage rituals for healing, fertility, and safe childbirth.

Indigenous people in highland Oaxaca have made pilgrimages to ritual caves for more than one thousand years (Rincón Mautner 2005). Historic cave shrines contained ossuaries where Mixtec people worshiped elite lineage ancestors and the places where their people were created (Rincón Mautner 2005:121–22). Pre-Columbian painted manuscripts illustrate Mixtec nobles visiting caves to give offerings and communicate with oracles residing there. The pilgrimage is depicted as people standing over footprints in front of caves (fig. 2.17; Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2005:69–71). Likewise, the Colossal Natural

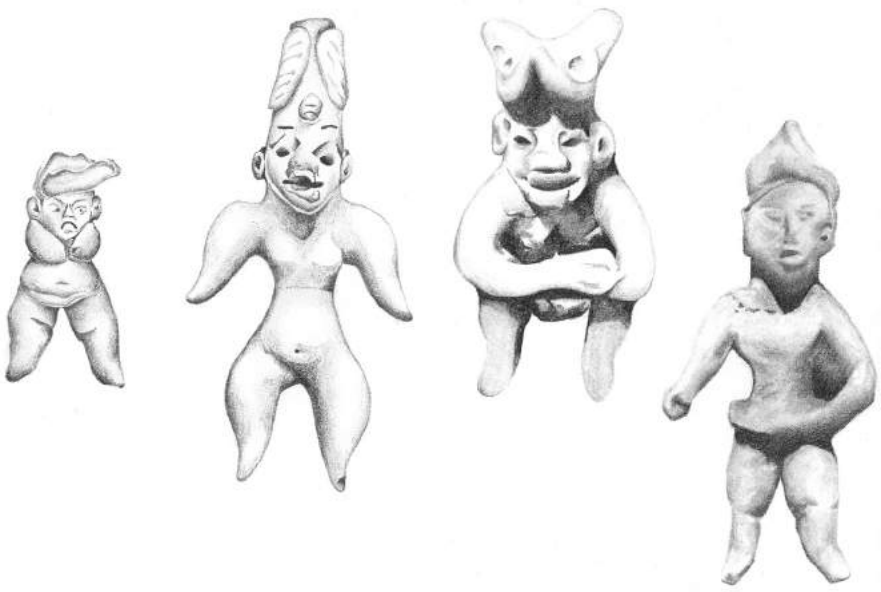

Figure 2.16. Female (left) and male (right) figurines from Chalcatzingo, Morelos, Mexico (drawing by Paulina Makuch after Harlan 1987:253, figs. 14.1 and 14.2; not to scale).

Bridge cave presents significant archaeological evidence for ancient Oaxacan pilgrimages (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2005:124–43). This impressive cave, which once had a stream running through it, contains paintings and artifacts. The steep, rocky hillside where the cave is found contained no settlements, thus pilgrims visiting the cave must have deposited the artifacts. A carved puma bone recovered in the cave shows rain and earth deities in human form arriving at the cave, which is shown as the maw of a serpent. Cotton textiles and numerous corncobs, which were probably offerings to the resident gods, were also reported in the cave. Rock paintings on the cave walls depict deer; gods of wind, rain, and death; calendar hieroglyphs; a handprint; an eyeball; and footprints leading from a mountain hieroglyph to an opened serpent mouth, which likely represents the cave (fig. 2.18). The paintings may refer to pilgrims arriving to see and touch the shrine and conduct rituals to earth and rain gods on certain calendar days. Rites were perhaps requests for abundant harvests, game animals, and the continuation of human life. Similar pilgrimage iconography, including footprints (glyphs 4, 6, and 7) linked to place signs and calendar dates, appears on an ancient carved stone from Oaxaca, the Lápida de Bazán, which depicts two figures, one apparently from Teotihuacan, walking

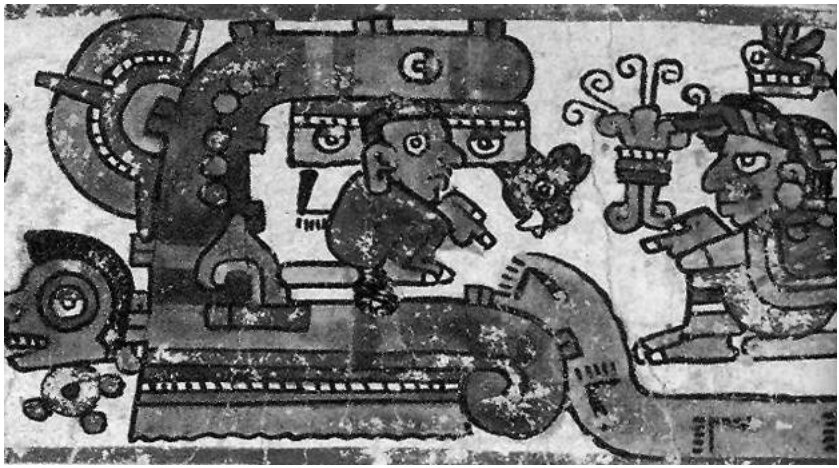

Figure 2.17. Mixtec pilgrim arrives at a cave shrine within a mountain and contacts an oracle. Note footprints on the road leading to the cave (Codex Bodley, p. 11).

to a shrine (Marcus and Flannery 2000:390), and on monuments at Xochilcalco, central Mexico (Smith and Hirth 2000:23–27).

PILGRIMAGE IN THE MAYA REGION

As with Mesoamerica as a whole, information on Maya pilgrimage to ritual landscapes is available from archaeology, ethnohistory, iconography, epigraphy, and ethnography. The evidence is particularly strong in relation to the nature and functions of Maya pilgrimages, and it also indicates that Maya pilgrimage parallels the Mesoamerican ritual behaviors presented in the earlier sections. The information reviewed in the following sections will be important for our interpretation of Maya ritual landscapes and pilgrimage in the Southern Maya Region later on.

Ethnographic Information

Ethnographers frequently describe Maya pilgrimages to ritual landscapes. While numerous authors have discussed the importance of pilgrimage in Maya religion—in relation to cosmic balance, identity, and economics—they have less frequently interpreted Maya pilgrimage as being important for the creation of territory or as a response to social and economic stresses, as it is

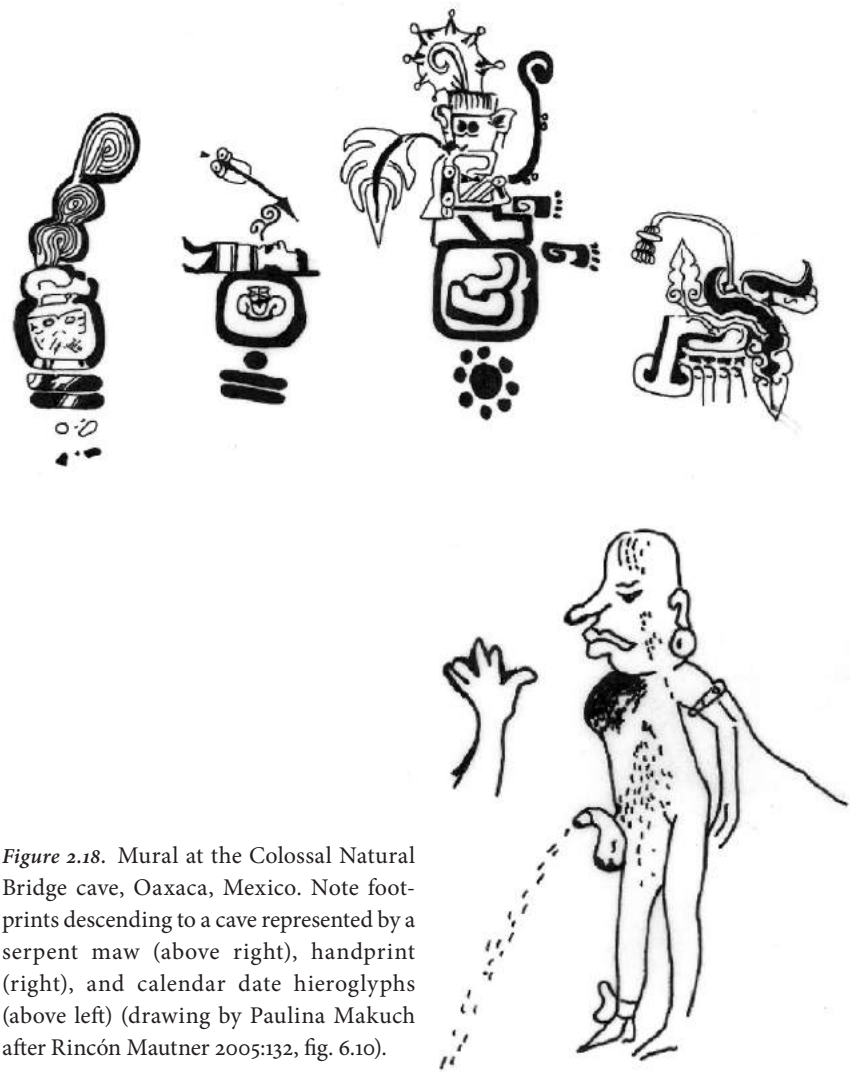

Figure 2.18. Mural at the Colossal Natural Bridge cave, Oaxaca, Mexico. Note footprints descending to a cave represented by a serpent maw (above right), handprint (right), and calendar date hieroglyphs (above left) (drawing by Paulina Makuch after Rincón Mautner 2005:132, fig. 6.10).

in other parts of Mesoamerica. Here, I cover a few case studies in the ethnography of the Maya to compare to examples of pilgrimage discussed previously, but I provide additional ethnographic examples of Maya pilgrimage in later chapters on the Southern Maya Region (see figs. 1.8 and 1.9). In one salient example, anthropologists have examined pilgrimage, ritual landscapes, and their importance for Maya community identity at Santiago Atitlan in highland Guatemala. Lake Atitlan with its crystalline waters pooled between high volcanoes has been a central ritual place for the Maya

over countless generations (Stanzione 2003), and Mayas still visit the lake communities for ceremony and markets. Interestingly, the lake once had a small island ceremonial center called Samabaj, which archaeologists interpret as an early pilgrimage shrine (ca. 200 B.C.–A.D. 200) and which was rapidly submerged in rising waters following a volcanic eruption (Benítez and Samayoa Asmus 2000; Medrano 2011; Medrano and Samayoa Asmus 2010). Today, Maya pilgrims trek to ritual landscapes at the lake and to sites associated with their past on the Pacific Coast. Maya men also visit boulder shrines in the hills around the lake to take part in hunting rituals that petition the earth or mountain lords to provide them with game animals, which they store in corrals in the ritual places (Brown 2009). Here they leave offerings of food, alcohol, and cigarettes to appease the earth lords or pay them for the animals, in addition to placing bones from hunted animals in the shrines to replace the animals they will kill.

Pilgrimages to the shrines of the community of Santiago Atitlan instruct young Tz'utujil Maya men about the history of their community and their ancestors (Stanzione 2007:317–23). During one pilgrimage, many young Maya men accompanied two elder religious specialists on a pilgrimage through the mountains, past volcanoes, and down to the Pacific Coast to their ancient community lands that had cacao groves located in Suchitepequez (or "Flower Mountain," a ritual "mountain of abundance" in Maya beliefs; Taube 2004). The pilgrimage took the initiates past ancestral places, like hilltop shrines, springs, and rivers, where the elders provided offerings and recounted their history and mythology, and the journey consisted of an orderly march along the "footpath/footprint of the sun" accompanied by music and the buzzing of bull-roarers (Stanzione 2003:108, 240). At their rest stops and shrines, the pilgrims were treated to alcohol, tobacco, prayers, and music. At their destination on the coast, other Mayas visited the pilgrims to ask them to plea for rain, a good harvest, children, health, and lucrative commerce for all. On their return home from their memorable trip, the pilgrims were tired, hungry, and sore from their pilgrimage "sacrifice," but they felt enlightened about their heritage. Only through pilgrimage do young people learn about the stories, songs, and events of the ancestral places of the Tz'utujil people. The pilgrimage also honors Maya women past and present who have and will continue to give birth to community members. Thus, the rites have strong fertility and identity components. The pilgrimage was seen as paying a debt to women who labor in childbirth and give birth to beautiful sons and daughters. The women who wait for the pilgrims to return give them gifts and ceremonial drinks of corn and cacao.

Ethnohistory and Archaeology

Spanish colonial documents describe Maya pilgrimages to ritual landscapes, which, they state, were as important as in the Old World. Cozumel, Isla Mujeres, Chichen Itza, and Izamal all served as major pilgrimage sites for the entire Maya region. The shrines received Maya pilgrims not only from Yucatán, but likewise from Tabasco, Chiapas, and Guatemala (Roys et al. 1940:5–6). "They held Cozumel and the well at Chichen Itza in as great veneration as we do the pilgrimages of Jerusalem and Rome; and thus they went to visit them and offer gifts, especially at Cozumel, as we do at holy places. And when they did not go, they always sent their offerings" (Tozzer 1966:109–10). Spanish chroniclers state that the island of Cozumel, off the east coast of Yucatán, contained a principal Maya shrine whose oracles ("talking idols") were visited by pilgrims from different provinces (Roys et al. 1940:5–6). Spanish sources also mentioned that Maya raised roads with plastered white surfaces (*sacbe* or "white road") led to the eastern shore of Yucatán so that people would not lose their way to the island (Roys et al. 1940:5). Ports of call for Maya pilgrims on this route were the sites of Tulum and Tancah on the coast of Yucatán, which had temples, cenotes containing rock art and ceremonial ceramics, and ritual cliffs (Miller 1982). Furthermore, canoe traders from distant areas stopped at Cozumel to sell their wares, visit the shrines, and take on supplies, which indicates the island had an economic function as well.

Mayas arrived at Cozumel and provided rich offerings from all parts of their world so the deities would grant them what they desired. Maya pilgrims also made offerings to fulfill their vows to the gods and gain merit. They sought remission of their mistakes and made requests of the gods by providing many human sacrifices through heart extraction. Mayas visited Cozumel while transporting goods via canoes around the Yucatán Peninsula, performed rituals at the island's temples, and traded with other travelers. Cozumel was important because of its large size, shrine constructions with deity images, and location in the sea in the direction of the rising sun (Paxton 2001:133–35), which was associated with renewal and the continuation of life. Like island shrines in the classical world, Cozumel's temples contained oracles. Archaeologists have explored the shrines, causeways, and other archaeological sites of Cozumel and found proof of their ceremonial importance (Sabloff and Rathje 1975). Small standing shrine buildings on top of large platforms date to the Late Postclassic period, but the ceramics excavated

indicate that Mayas have been on the island since Preclassic times. The ceramic and architectural styles at Cozumel indicate cultural ties with northern Yucatán, and trade items, such as carved jades and ceramics, including examples from Guatemala and fine pottery from Yucatán and Tabasco, have been recovered (Connor 1975; Freidel and Sabloff 1984; Gregory 1975; Sabloff and Rathje 1975).

Maya informants residing in Cozumel indicated that they did not have rulers and that they participated in brisk commerce. The only authority was a Maya priest, or *ah k'in* ("he of the sun" or "sun watcher"), who presided over rituals and communicated with the deity images on behalf of the pilgrims. A central image on the island represented Ix Chel, the goddess of weaving, fertility, and childbirth. A Maya priest spoke to this image, which was a hollow ceramic vessel that allowed a person to hide inside. Ix Chel, or rather, the person inside the image, replied to him and the other pilgrims present. Isla Mujeres (Island of Women), found just to the north of Cozumel, had similar images that were worshiped by women hoping for successful pregnancies and childbirth. One shrine to Ix Chel held a carved stone column with a woman, perhaps Ix Chel herself, giving birth or preparing to breastfeed (Holmes 1895:plate IV; Houston 1996:146). Holmes's photo (fig. 2.19) and drawing show "imprints of the red hand" over the carving's head (Holmes 1895:66, 78), but these handprints are not clear in reproductions of his photograph (see Patel 2005:95, fig. 5.1). Holmes (1895:66–67) also mentions the ubiquity of red handprints in the other Maya ruins that he visited in Yucatán. Recent Maya pilgrims to the shrines likely left these handprints, although they could date to the colonial period. In another ritual dedicated to an image of Ah Hulneb, an archer god, the Maya performed a dance and sacrifice by shooting a dog with arrows (Roys et al. 1940:6), which may have been connected to success in war or hunting.

One shrine at the site of San Gervasio on Cozumel, called Las Manitas (Little Hands) temple, has a stucco facade with murals containing designs in black lines on a Maya blue background (fig. 2.20). On the right side of the temple facade, Maya visitors made red right-hand prints over the wall stucco, suggesting a Late Postclassic to historic date for the prints. Importantly, a cave entrance is found to the back of this shrine, and a passage runs underneath it (fig. 2.21). This cave contains freshwater since palms and reeds grow out of it. Small shrines also surround this cave entrance. A stone causeway or sacbe, which probably had a plastered white surface, led Maya worshipers from Las Manitas to a central temple complex at the site where pilgrims

Figure 2.19. Sculpture of goddess Ix Chel in a birthing position in a shrine on Cozumel Island, Mexico. Note recent red handprints on the column above the figure's head (after Holmes 1895:66).

gathered. A branch of this causeway continues under an archway (fig. 2.22) and runs about one kilometer to a rectangular shrine construction on a round substructure (fig. 2.23). Another stone causeway heads from the site's central temple complex to a tall temple dedicated to Ix Chel.

Patel (2005, 2009) points out that pilgrimage sites on the island were

Figure 2.20. Red handprints to the right on a temple wall, Las Manitas (Little Hands) Temple, San Gervasio, Cozumel Island, Mexico.

drawn from the ritual landscapes of Maya religion. Economic interaction was actually less important than religion on Cozumel, with trade following and financing pilgrimage and not the reverse (Patel 2005:91, 93, 97–100). Pilgrimage circuits on the island, defined by shrines and the causeways connecting them, centered on ritual caves and cenotes. Pilgrims focused on worshipping at sanctuaries dedicated to Ix Chel, some of which had oracles, and providing offerings in the caves and cenotes that were the abodes of this goddess (Patel 2009:214). Rites at the island's shrines, which were associated with earth, water, and the rising sun and moon since Cozumel is found to

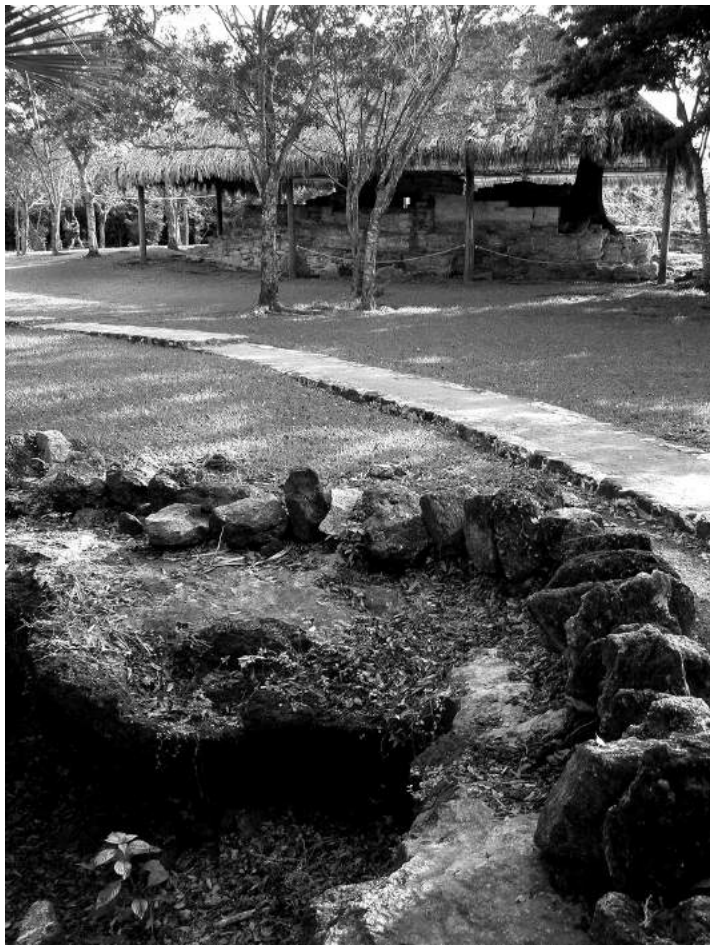

Figure 2.21. Cave passage under Las Manitas Temple, San Gervasio, Cozumel Island, Mexico.

the east, concentrated on the fertility, renewal, and well-being of humans and the cosmos. Aged female religious specialists were the oracles who provided pronouncements related to the outcomes of war (Patel 2009:210), and women participated in pilgrimage rituals on the island (Patel 2009:214).

Spanish sources state that Maya pilgrims visited the shrine at Izamal (Itzmal) in eastern Yucatán to be cured or to maintain their health, but they went to Chichen Itza to pray for rain and to receive a prophecy on the coming year (Roys et al. 1940:5). The Maya pilgrims walked on intersite roads of plastered limestone construction to reach shrines in Yucatán, and they stopped

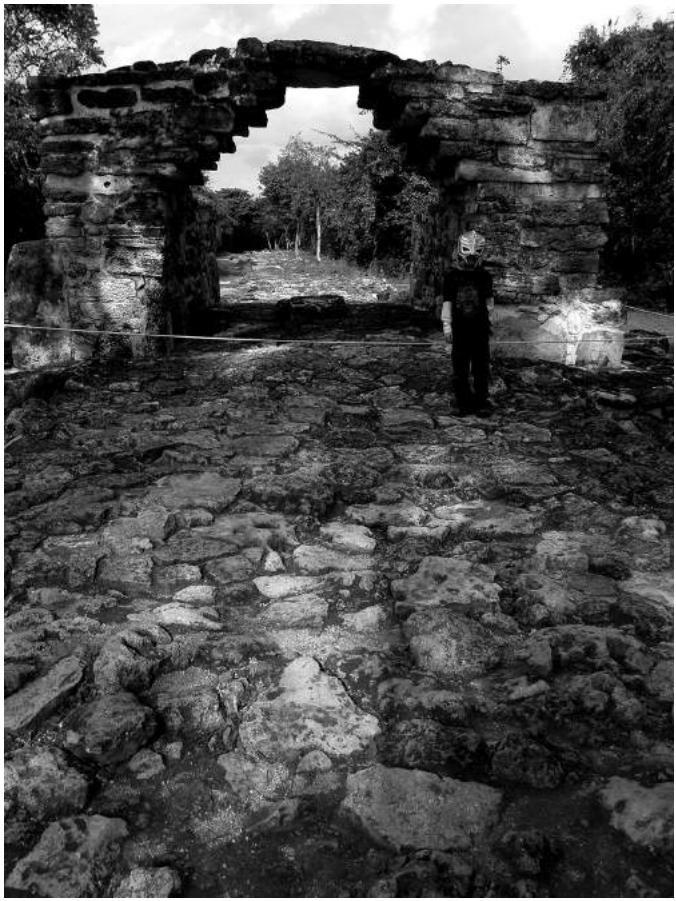

Figure 2.22. Stone causeway and arch leading to a shrine, San Gervasio, Cozumel Island, Mexico (seven-year-old boy is for scale).

to give offerings in temples (Shaw 2008:119–20). Brisk commerce also followed Maya pilgrims along these roads (Martínez Marín 1972:174). The historic sources state that at Chichen Itza, like Cozumel, human sacrifices were made: people were flung into the large ritual well at Chichen Itza ("Mouth of the Well" or "Cave of the Itzaj"), and hearts were removed at Cozumel. Chichen Itza has impressive pyramids adorned with stone sculptures, the largest ball court in Yucatán, sinkholes, a substantial settlement, and ceremonial causeways. The ritual well at Chichen Itza, with its large round opening, one-hundred-foot drop to the water's surface, and sheer limestone sides,

Figure 2.23. Shrine at a causeway terminus, San Gervasio, Cozumel Island, Mexico.

is indeed an impressive natural sinkhole or cenote (from Yucatec Mayan *ts'onot*). The Yucatec name for this ritual well is Chen K'uh ("Divine Cave/Pool/Opening" or the "Divine's Opening"). A shrine platform can be seen on the south end of the cenote's mouth where offerings were made (see fig. 3.24). A causeway connects the southern extreme of the well with the main ceremonial precinct, which is made up of a large plaza for public gatherings, the great ball court, and the tallest temple, El Castillo.

Ceremonies at the ritual well and temples at Chichen Itza have been important from the Classic period to historic times. Written sources indicate that the offerings to the well consisted of people thrown in alive, including young boys and girls, and "precious stones and things which [the Mayas] prized" (Tozzer 1966). If the sacrificial victims survived the fall and an extended period in the well, they were extracted and expected to relay messages from the gods. These people became intermediaries between the Maya and the deities in the cenote. News from rain deities, or gods called *chak* (*chahk*), was thought to be particularly important. Archaeologists have recovered a large quantity of ceremonial artifacts and human bones, many from children under fifteen years of age, by dredging the well. The portable

artifacts come from all over the Maya region and Central America and include carved jade from Guatemala (Coggins and Shane 1984). Furthermore, green obsidian from central Mexico, copper and alabaster from east Mexico, and gold items from Panama and Costa Rica were also found in the cenote. The findings indicate multiregional connections and multiethnic pilgrims at Chichen Itza. Additionally, the great variety of artifacts indicates trade during pilgrimage to the site.

Hieroglyphs and Art

The locations and layouts of Classic Maya regal-ritual centers indicate their importance for community ceremonies and pilgrimage. Causeways lead to many of these centers or connect temples within the sites. The Maya constructed plazas near temples where multitudes gathered for ceremonies and markets. Ancient Maya art and hieroglyphs in the centers show that Maya people perceived temples as ritual mountains (*witz*; Stone 1995:27), which were often located next to ceremonial caves, springs, and other mountains. Place-names from ancient Maya hieroglyphic texts include prominent geographic features (Stuart and Houston 1994) that were destinations for ritual specialists and pilgrims. For instance, the place-name of Aguateca, Petén, refers to the site's split mountain, and toponyms at nearby Dos Pilas signify springs that are prominent at the site. Maya rulers were "sacred" ("divine" and "good" [?]) nobles of these specific places, and the Maya equated governance, identity, territory, and divinity with ritual landscapes. Place also denoted polity and kingship, and elites visited the political centers of their peers to participate in rituals.

Ancient Maya hieroglyphs provide clues about pilgrimage to ritual landscapes. Across the globe people create texts related to pilgrimage experiences to show their devotion to and participation in this activity (Coleman and Elsner 1995; McCorriston 2011:63–67, 73, 84), and these texts are often found at pilgrimage sites themselves. Maya texts focus on bodily experiences and the senses during rituals, including movement and position in addition to touching and seeing. Hieroglyphs frequently mention that Maya nobles "arrived at" or "came to" places (*huliy* and *hulaj*; fig. 2.24), usually the centers belonging to other nobles, to establish new ruling lineages, intermarry with local elites, and conduct or oversee rituals. Hieroglyphs also describe the arrival of the new moon during its cyclical travels, which may be interpreted as a pilgrimage by the Maya lunar goddess. The concept of *hul*, the root of

the word found in inscriptions, relates to travel to or arrival at a place, according to dictionaries compiled by Spanish priests. The historic Yucatec Mayan term *hula* refers to a "recently arrived visitor who is housed," a "pilgrim," a "friendly visitor," and the "condition of being a pilgrim" (Barrera Vásquez 1991:242–43). Importantly, huliy statements appear in the texts on the walls at the Maya caves of Joloniel in Chiapas, Naj Tunich in Petén, and Loltun Cave in Yucatán and describe the arrival of elite pilgrims (Stone 1995:177; see chapters 5 and 6; fig. 2.25). This verb sometimes appears next to the cave or opening hieroglyph (*ch'e'en*), indicating that nobles arrived at caves to undertake rituals and paint texts and images (Stone 1995:fig. 7-2; Stuart and Houston 1994:55).

To write the huliy arrival hieroglyph, ancient Maya scribes formed a human right hand that touches, gestures, or points (Macri and Looper 2003:123, MRA glyphs). This sign may have referred to pilgrims touching or manipulating objects during ceremonies after their arrival at a site. Touching ritual or sacred places is important in pilgrimages across the globe, and this act explains the presence of hand imagery and handprints in shrines and pilgrimage art cross-culturally. Handprints, often made with red paint, are ubiquitous on the walls of caves, cliffs, and abandoned temples throughout the Maya region. Maya ruins, shrines, and caves were important for Maya rituals; thus, the handprints may signify the touching of ritual landscapes or the acquisition of sacred power through the hands. The idea of hands as portals for supernatural energy to pass through upon touch can be seen in the depiction of hands with circles, holes, or eyes in the palms (Hall 1997:127). Maya pilgrims to Tixcuytun Cave ("At the Stone [Cave (?)] of the Feminine Earth Snake" in Yucatec Mayan; Barrera Rubio and Peraza Lope 1999:55n1) in Yucatán made circles in the palms of their handprints (fig. 2.26), possibly denoting this portal that was activated upon their touching the cave wall (Barrera Rubio and Peraza Lope 1999:40, 42–45; Palka 2005a). The handprints at ritual places can also be conceived as the signs of pilgrims or deities present at the shrines. Hieroglyphic texts at Palenque, Chiapas (Stuart 2005:77–80), mention that when tutelary deities of Palenque are born, or manifested, they touch the earth (*u tal k'ab*; see fig. 2.24) at the mythological site of Matawil. This event may be symbolized by the rising waters of nearby Lake Catazaja during the rainy season and the subsequent births of large numbers of animals and birds here (see chapter 5). This hieroglyph for touching contains a human hand touching the earth sign below it (Macri and Looper 2003:121, MR4 glyphs), just as a pilgrim would touch the earth or

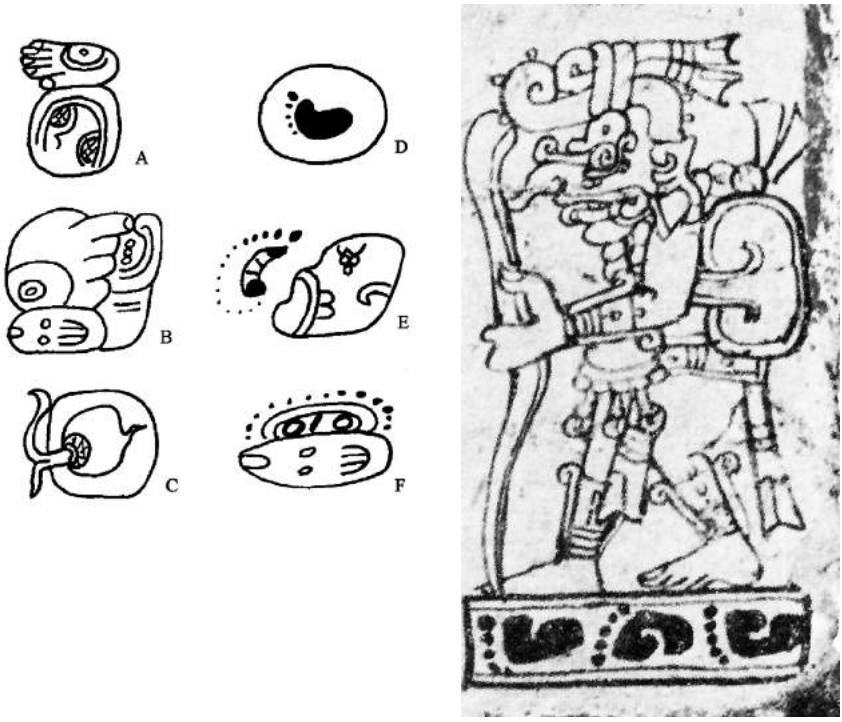

Figure 2.24. Maya hieroglyphs and images related to ritual and pilgrimage: (A) "touch the earth" (note palm portal); (B) huliy ("arrive" [to touch]); (C) il ("see" [eyeball]); (D) bih (road/footpath); (E) tab'ay ("dedicate [walk up the temple]," note stylized footprint on steps); (F) hul or tal ("arrive," note abstract footprint on top); and rain god Chak on the road (Dresden Codex, p. 45).

stone at a ritual place. The hand in this hieroglyph has a circle on its palm (Stuart 2005:78), possibly denoting a portal.

Strecker (1982:53) mentions the presence of red handprints in the upper vault at Akab-Tzib (Your Hand-Drawn/Written), which have been related to the god Kabul of the celestial or working hand. He also points out that Kabul has been likened to the Yucatec Maya god Itzim'na (Itsamna'), who could cure the sick with the touch of his hand. Martínez Marín (1972:174) also associates the Yucatec Maya deities of Kabul, Itzamatul, and Itsamna' with the pilgrimage site of Itzamal. He states that the site is named after Izamatul, or "He That Receives or Possesses Grace [by the Hand]," who was represented by the "working hand." The hand symbolism in the deity name is similar to symbolism at other pilgrimage centers in Mesoamerica, like Chalma. Maya

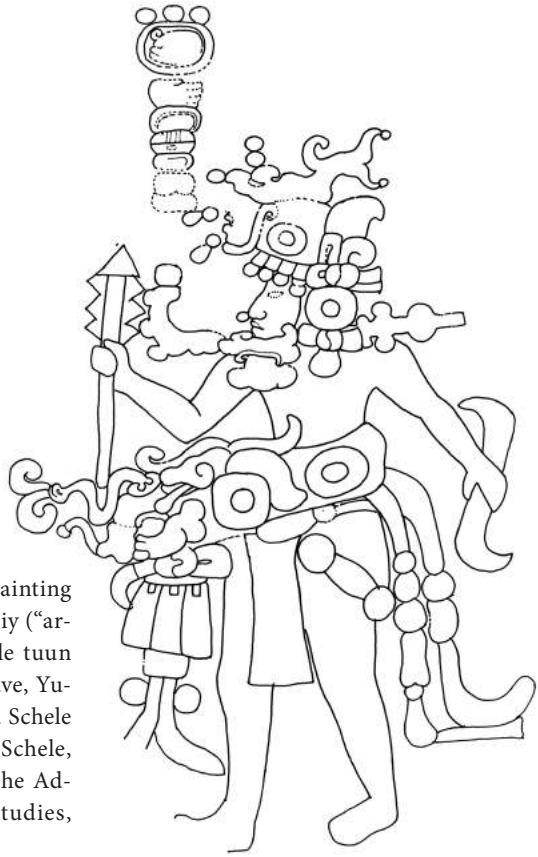

Figure 2.25. Preclassic Maya cave painting with walking Maya noble and huliy ("arrival," hand variant) and possible tuun ([at the] stone) glyphs, Loltun Cave, Yucatán, Mexico (drawing by Linda Schele [image number 6900], © David Schele, courtesy of the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc., www.famsi.org).

pilgrims made offerings to this oracular deity requesting good health (Solari 2013:36–39). They even brought their dead to this god's image to ritually revive them. Strecker (1982:52) also states that handprints in the Maya region may be related to pilgrims touching the ritual places to which they have traveled to show the resident gods that they have finished their ritual obligations. He notes that contemporary pilgrims have left numerous handprints at shrines in the southwest United States and at the pilgrimage church of Sacromonte in Amecameca, Mexico, to show resident deities that they personally completed their rites.

Another Mayan term, *tali*, was utilized for "arrival" in ancient Maya texts (see fig. 2.24). Specifically, the word *tali* or *tal* signifies "came," "left a place," or "came to touch" in dictionaries (Barrera Vásquez 1991:764–65). The verb

Figure 2.26. Foot- and handprints, Tixcuytun Cave, Yucatán, Mexico. Note circle or portal in the palm of the hand (drawing by Paulina Makuch after Barrera Rubio and Peraza Lope 1999:43, photo 3).

implies arrival to a place after leaving a distant locale. Interestingly, in the tali arrival hieroglyph the Maya scribes employed a human footprint (Macri and Looper 2003:116, HTE glyphs), which frequently signifies travel by foot in Mesoamerica (see figs. 2.10, 2.13, and 2.17). This same foot sign was used by the Maya scribes to write a dedication verb (*tab'ay*) that shows a footprint ascending the steps of a pyramid, where dedication ceremonies occurred (see fig. 2.24). This verb refers to the consecration or finishing of objects, stone monuments, and buildings, which may also have involved pilgrimages of Maya elites to the ceremonies. Additionally, footprints in Maya iconography and hieroglyphs read as *bih*, *beh*, or *beel* can be glossed as "road," "travel," or "pilgrimage" in Mayan languages (see fig. 2.24). The concept of leaving on a road to travel to ritual landscapes away from one's home is clear in the Tzeltal Mayan phrase *lok' ta beel* ("go out/emerge/leave on the road [for pilgrimage]"; Méndez Guzmán 1998:169, 373). With spatial referents in Yucatec Mayan, *b'eel* refers to travel on a road to a landmark, whereas *b'eh* indicates travel from a landmark; *b'eekan* (road-serpent) means "meandering road" (Hanks 1990:381).

The use of footprints to represent travel, shrine visitation, and pilgrimage

is especially significant in ancient and historic indigenous Mesoamerican monuments and manuscripts from across Mesoamerica, which depict footprints leading to ritual landscapes. And footprints of traveling pilgrims or gods commonly appear in caves, monuments, and temples themselves. Near the Pacific coast of Chiapas, for example, large footprints pecked in boulders directed pilgrims from one mountain shrine to the next (Pincemin Deliberos 1999:32–35, 128). In another case, Maya pilgrims to the Preclassic ruins and monuments at Takalik Abaj left offerings of incense and small stones in ceramic vessels near Altar 45 (fig. 2.27), a boulder adorned only with footprints (Schieber de Lavarreda and Orrego Corzo 2010:192–94). Additionally, at the site of Kinal, Petén, archaeologists found a footprint painted in red on the wall of a temple at a causeway terminus (Graham 1967:38). The footprint graffito was created by a Maya pilgrim traveling on the causeway, and it may represent the presence of the pilgrim or a spiritual essence. Footprints, along with many handprints, have also been documented at Loltun Cave (Helmke and Awe 1998:149), the Sierrita de Ticul caves in Yucatán (Stone 1997:36), and Pusilha Cave in Guatemala (Stone 1995:97–98). In Tixcuytun Cave in Yucatán, Maya pilgrims made footprints on the cave walls by blowing red pigments over their feet (Barrera Rubio and Peraza Lope 1999:40, 42–45). Barrera Rubio and Peraza Lope (1999:42–51) state that the hand- and footprints at Tixcuytun Cave were graphemes made by Maya pilgrims to indicate their presence. The cave also has other paintings on its walls, including god faces, deer heads, stick figures, geometric shapes, and quatrefoil symbols that may refer to the cave itself or to the four ceremonial directions of the Maya universe (Barrera Rubio and Peraza Lope 1999:42–51). Tixcuytun Cave contains no signs of human habitation; thus, the paintings, prints, and the artifacts must have been left by Maya pilgrims.

The act of seeing is another important metaphor for pilgrimages to ritual places, ceremonies, and objects around the world. Maya hieroglyphic texts discussing arrival at a ceremony utilize the glyph *ilaj*, or "saw/witnessed" or "did the seeing" (Brady and Sears 2000; Stone 1995). This hieroglyph consists of an eyeball with eyelashes and lines emanating from the pupil signifying sight (Macri and Looper 2003:105, HE1 glyphs; see fig. 2.24). The glyph also refers to the seeing of ritual by Maya elites, frequently at ceremonial centers and ritual landscapes (Stuart and Houston 1994:55). While the context of the inscriptions indicates that kings traveled to other sites to oversee rituals, it is possible that nobles also made pilgrimages to allies' centers to witness ceremonies. Houston (2006:141) deciphers a clause on the cave wall of Naj Tunich

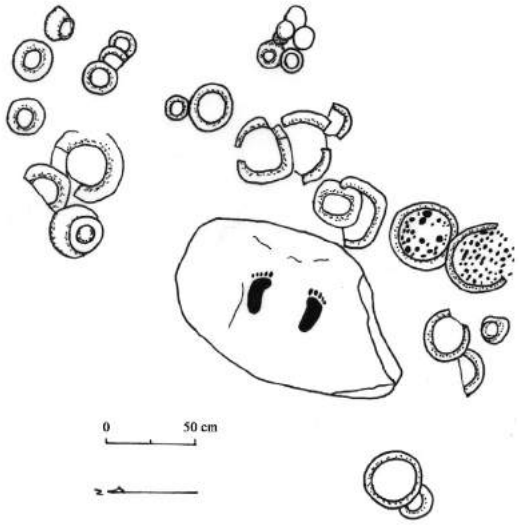

Figure 2.27. Altar 45 (monolith) with carved footprints, ceramic incense burners, and plates with many pebble blessings at the ruins of Takalik Abaj, Guatemala. Note possible pilgrims' gouges on the stone (after Schieber de Lavarreda and Orrego Corzo 2010:194, fig. 8.13).

as *il b'ih, il way*, or "see the road, see the co-essence/soul spirit," which may refer either to the cave as an abode for spiritual energies or to pilgrimage to the cave. This verb also appears in the texts describing Maya nobles traveling to the site of another noble, usually a subordinate, to participate in rituals. In Yucatec Mayan, *il* signifies "see, observe, be present, visit, and permit" (Barrera Vásquez 1991:267).

Seer is a term for Maya religious specialists and healers who conduct pilgrimages to ritual landscapes. For example, the contemporary Tzotzil Maya from highland Chiapas refer to religious specialists by using the root *i* or *il* (see) in *h'iloletik* ("shaman" or "seeing ones") or *h'ilol* (seer)—those who peer into spiritual realms in the mountains and observe their ancestral gods (Vogt 1965:39–42). These Tzotzil religious specialists go on pilgrimage circuits to mountains and water holes near their communities to communicate with spiritual essences (Vogt 1965:46–47). Perhaps the acts of seeing, visiting, and ceremony in Maya texts occurred during pilgrimages to the sites where the rituals took place, which may explain the presence of eyes and faces painted on cave walls. For example, the Tixcuytun Cave discussed previously

exhibits eyes and faces on its walls (Barrera Rubio and Peraza Lope 1999:40, 43–44, 47–48). These designs may refer to the seeing of the ritual participants in the cave or to that of the gods living there and witnessing the ceremonies. Lacandon ritual specialists paint red circles on ceremonial *balche* mead-mixing troughs made of wood so that the gods can see the rituals (Petryshyn 1968:17). A common version of the ch'e'en glyph for cave or ritual opening in the earth in Classic Maya place-names contains an eyeball inside a darkened sign, perhaps denoting "seeing within the cave."

Other hieroglyphs in Maya cave inscriptions also refer to pilgrimage. For instance, the verb *pakxi* in Ch'oltian and Yucatecan languages means "returning/has returned" (Stone 1995:177–79). A text in a cave called Santo Domingo near Naj Tunich may mention an incense-burning ceremony performed by a person or a deity (Fahsen and Brady 1993:fig. 2, glyphs at 3a and 5b; Stone 1995:97, fig. 4-111). The verb is written as a meandering smoke scroll coming out of a phonetic *yi* hieroglyph and may refer to pilgrimage and burning at the cave, as seen in texts at Naj Tunich. Alternatively, this text may reference a war event where something was burned, perhaps a person or deity at the cave, and taken captive (*bak*; glyph 5a). It is also possible that the verb reads *loki*, or "left/went out of (the cave)," which, as mentioned earlier, is the verb used to describe pilgrimage in Tzeltal Mayan.

Archaeological Examples of Maya Pilgrimage

Archaeological evidence indicates that pilgrimage was important in ancient Maya culture long before the introduction of Christianity (Brady and Sears 2000; Freidel 1975; Stone 1976:111, 122; Walker 1990). Ancient Maya centers were common destinations for Maya pilgrims, and the temple constructions on the edges of large plazas, the public rituals at these locations, and the display of carved stone monuments drew in large crowds from surrounding areas (see fig. 1.11). These ritual centers would have provided much political, economic, and religious power to their resident lords, who competed with one another for vassals and regional power through the establishment of these religious temples and pilgrimage centers.

Major Maya sites had causeways connected to temples and plazas. Researchers often describe how these causeways *radiate outward* to other Maya sites and ceremonial precincts (Hansen et al. 2008:31), as if these outlying sites were the principal destinations of travelers. However, we should look at causeways as *converging in* on specific temples and plazas since they

brought Maya pilgrims to their destination points (Ringle 1999). Examples include El Mirador, Petén, Guatemala (Hansen et al. 2008), and Isla Cerritos, which is an island off the north coast of Yucatán with a causeway leading to it (Andrews 1983:33). Causeways also led Maya pilgrims to the cenote at Chichen Itza (Coggins and Shane 1984:18) and a ritual cave at Actun Nak Beh, Belize (Halperin 2005). The convergence of causeways at major temples in site cores may be related to Mayas' concepts of their sites as being the center of the world or "umbilicus/navel of the world" (Carlsen 2009:303; Vogt 1981:125). Stuart (2011:233) suggests that the extensive, well-constructed causeways at the major Maya site of Coba, Quintana Roo, indicate that the site was a major pilgrimage center. The astronomical associations of the Coba causeways have been pointed out by Folan (1991), who suggests that rituals related to Maya calendars occurred at the locations associated with the roads. Several lakes and tall pyramids are also found at Coba, which may have attracted people to the site from Classic to Postclassic times for rain and agricultural rituals. The tall temples symbolized artificial mountains, and the lakes were waters of creation. Coba was also a stop for Maya pilgrims traveling to shrines at Itzmal (Izamal) and Cozumel.

In a study directly examining Maya pilgrimage, Walker (1990) discusses the abundant archaeological evidence for pilgrimage to the ancient center of Cerros in Belize. Cerros contains high temples and is located on a peninsula on the edge of Corozal Bay, which can be seen from a considerable distance (Scarborough 1991:3; Walker 1990:4). Maya architects actually made Cerros an island by cutting the site off from the mainland with a large canal (Freidel 1986:14; Schele and Freidel 1990:99; Walker 1990:229), which not only increased the defensibility of the site, but made Cerros an important ritual landscape by surrounding it with water. The placement of the core group of temples near the bay demonstrates the ceremonial importance of water and the interface between land and water at the site (Walker 1990:459–60). The site was utilized by Maya people over many centuries—much longer than other Maya sites. In Preclassic times, Cerros contained residences along with large temples, but it still could have functioned as a pilgrimage shrine. The site was abandoned by the Late Classic period, but it was reoccupied by small Terminal Classic to Early Postclassic populations. After an Early Postclassic occupation, ritual deposits in addition to evidence of ephemeral occupations and camps indicate that Cerros was a pilgrimage center.

During the Late Postclassic period, Maya pilgrims came to Cerros to give offerings, burn incense, make human sacrifices, bury their dead, and cache

ceremonial objects in and in front of the ruined structures, especially Structure 4, the tallest building at the site (Walker 1990). The visitors cleared areas on top of mounds and built small structures and altars for ceremonies. The rituals in the ruins may have continued into the colonial period since some pottery types were still used in historic times. Objects utilized in rituals and deposited in caches at Cerros include ceramic effigy censers, copper bells, obsidian blades and arrow points, a conch shell trumpet, chert knives (the sacred number of thirteen in one temple cache; Walker 1990:306), beads (made of jade, turquoise, and shell), ceramic figurines, sharks' teeth, gold sheets, and metal disks made of tumbaga (Garber 1989; Walker 1990). Copper bells may have been worn around the necks, ankles, and wrists of the celebrants and sacrificial victims, as depicted in modeled ceramic effigy incense burners at the site (Walker 1990:304). The Maya pilgrims offered objects to their gods at the temple mounds at this ritual landscape, which can be viewed as portals into the abodes of spiritual forces.

The different types of pottery and trade items indicate interaction between Mayas near Cerros and other nonlocal Maya groups. Specifically, they indicate pilgrimage to Cerros by Maya people from several Postclassic sites in Belize and Yucatán (Walker 1990). The Maya worshipers may have utilized Cerros as a major pilgrimage site during heightened competition in the Postclassic period following the political collapse of the Classic period and the subsequent development of the sea-borne trade. At the same time, the site may have served as a pilgrimage destination for people traveling along the coast to trade and visit other ritual landscapes and Maya centers, including Cozumel. Yet the high concentration of ceramics similar to material from Santa Rita Corozal, located on the mainland across the bay, indicates that Mayas from the mainland maintained their territory by undertaking pilgrimages to Cerros, which may have been a central ritual place for them (Walker 1990:vi, 337–38, 408–9).

In a recent investigation, Arroyo (2010:321–24) interprets the site of Naranjo in highland Guatemala as a regional pilgrimage center during the Formative period. The site's plaza is framed by a hill on one side and springs on the other, and in between the ancient people made a row of monuments, walkways, and ceremonial structures. The surrounding mountains and ravines constituted the ritual landscapes of Naranjo, and they made the site difficult to access. Furthermore, monuments and shrine constructions are situated at natural springs in the site (fig. 2.28). Arroyo (2010:321) also points out that the dearth of domestic structures and burials, in addition to the return of later visitors to the site for ritual, indicates that Naranjo probably

Figure 2.28. Line of basalt monuments near mounds, springs, and hills, Naranjo, highland Guatemala.

functioned as a pilgrimage center. The material culture at the site, including diverse styles of ceramic figurines, pottery, and sculpture, shows that different groups participated in rituals that brought social cohesion (Arroyo 2010:323). The monuments and their alignments also suggest that the pilgrimage rituals were governed by calendar cycles (Arroyo 2010:322).

In this chapter I have discussed behaviors and material culture associated with pilgrimage around the world. People contact spiritual forces, and they travel to their abodes in ritual landscapes to placate them with offerings and gain merit. People converge on pilgrimage shrines to see, touch, and take sacred material, including water, dirt, and other objects. Material culture at

pilgrimage shrines may include offerings, religious architecture and spaces, and iconography, such as depictions of pilgrims, graffiti, and hand- and footprints. The experience of separation from domestic sites and their subsequent return home enable pilgrims to experience religious life at its fullest, and these experiences also allow them to achieve their ritual goals. Movement is essential to the experience as pilgrims arrive at and circulate within shrines (Alvarado Solís 2008). Economic interaction is also common at pilgrimage sites. Pilgrims receive goods and services, and they trade with one another so that artifacts from many different regions and periods can be found at shrines. The control over pilgrimage ritual, economic organization, myriad exotic goods, and territory translates into power and privilege for the leaders in society.

We have established that pilgrimage was important in Mesoamerica and that it can be examined through a consideration of several converging lines of evidence in the Maya area, ranging from ethnography to archaeology, epigraphy, and iconography. A similar treatment of ritual landscapes follows in the next chapter, which establishes the main types of ritual landscapes in Mesoamerica and how they articulate with religion and identity, particularly in the Maya area.

CHAPTER THREE

Ritual Landscapes, Communicating Places, and Community

> At the foot of the precipice, between the feared "hills that come together," sound the waters of the Enchanted Pool, whose strong whirlpools swallow whomever comes near them. Perpendicular to that pool is found the sacred rock called "stone on horseback," where rites are performed [by Ch'orti' Maya] that allow one to enter the underworld and return.
>
> —Raphael Girard, *People of the Chan*, 1995, 107

The concept of ritual landscape can refer to many things. In this book, I focus on ritual landscapes as significant places in past and present Maya and Mesoamerican religion, history, and pilgrimage. I concentrate on the uses of landscapes that can be examined through archaeology, including cave, spring, and mountain shrines, as in the examples in the epigraph. Ritual landscapes constitute places in the natural world classified by native people as homes of spiritual essences—divine beings, gods, invisible forces, and ancestors whom Mesoamerican people interact with and who affect their lives. These landscapes are the loci for rituals and pilgrimages related to communication with spiritual beings for the purpose of perpetuating social and cosmic balance. Ritual landscapes are created because of their cultural-historical importance and the perceptions of their outstanding physical characteristics, and these places are also incorporated into local histories and community boundaries. Therefore, ritual landscapes are crucial for the negotiation of social identity and territory. We need to explore the geography and cultural constructs of landscapes to better understand pilgrimage, since the destination is a critical component of this ritual practice (Stoddard and Morinis 1997).

Maya ritual landscapes initially captivated visitors to the Southern Maya Region in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Explorers encountered the material remains of recent Maya rituals in caves, and they witnessed ceremonies in Maya ruins (Blom and La Farge 1926; La Farge 1947; Maler 1901; Petryshyn 2005; Vos 1988b:225–30). Since the first reports on Maya ritual landscapes, much anthropological interest has revolved around the religious beliefs associated with them. The numerous ethnographies on contemporary Maya ritual landscapes in the study area have aimed to record extant Maya religious practices, provide comparisons and contrasts with other religious traditions, and reconstruct ancient Maya religion and ritual. The connections between group identity and ritual landscapes are obvious since modern Maya people protect ritual landscapes by hiding their locations and ritual landscapes are significant for modern Mayas who maintain indigenous lifeways, religious beliefs, territory, and sovereignty following the intrusion of foreign groups. Vogt (1981) states that mountains, openings in the earth (caves, springs, cliffs, and sink holes), unusual boulders, mountain passes, and trees make up the five major classes of ritual places for the Tzotzil Maya at Zinacantan, and these ritual landscapes have been important in Chiapas since at least the sixteenth century (McVicker 1974:550). The ethnographic information that follows provides significant insights on Maya religious beliefs and practices around ritual landscapes that help us reconstruct past Maya behaviors.

RITUAL LANDSCAPES

From subjective and sensorial perspectives, ritual landscapes, or "sacred places," are made up of features that are highly visible and an important part of human experience (Anschuetz et al. 2001; Ashmore and Knapp 1999; Bowser and Zedeño 2009; Gonzalo 1999:257–58). This experience is what gives meaning to ritual landscapes. Ritual landscapes can be associated with origin myths, ancestors, homes of spiritual essences, or locales where important mythical and historical events occurred. Landscape features are often associated with social memory and the preservation of the myths, histories, truths, and, consequently, the belonging of a people (Feld and Basso 1996; Moore 2004:84–87). Thus, social identities are often linked to the places where they were formed, reinforcing the power of ritual landscapes (Gonzalo 1999:258), and ritual landscapes are important to the establishment of indigenous

people's identity and community boundaries. Ritual landscapes are the loci of religious ceremonies and veneration of spiritual entities often removed from human settlements. Where ritual places exist within settlements, they are frequently associated with religious architecture. Researchers have recognized that certain ritual landscapes, such as hills, caves, cliffs, and bodies of water, are important cross-culturally (Morinis 1992; Stoddard and Morinis 1997; see figs. 1.2 and 2.1). Less commonly considered features of the natural world, such as large rocks (Bauer and Stanish 2001:198; Singh 2002:73), islands (Bauer and Stanish 2001; Turner and Turner 1978:110), and ancient ruins (Burger 1992; Dillon 1997:91; Snead 2008:84), must be included as well. These landscape features draw people's attention and impact the senses and the movements of the human body (Casey 1996). The phenomenological, religious, and social aspects of ritual landscapes, in addition to their centrality for pilgrimage, are what interest us in the following sections.

Due to their cultural, geographical, and sensory significance, ritual landscapes in Mesoamerica and the Maya area can be conceptualized as "communicating places" or places of interaction with spiritual essences. Additionally, ritual landscapes serve as an *axis mundi*, where sky, earth, and underworlds intersect and where human and spiritual realms meet (Brady and Ashmore 1999). Mesoamerican people attribute the unique art, material culture, and architecture at these places to their ancestors and spiritual beings (Hamman 2002). Religious specialists and worshipers directly contact spirit forces in their landscape abodes to reaffirm ties with them, make requests or payments, and acknowledge their obligations to sustain invisible entities with offerings. Furthermore, ritual landscapes are often visited during times of stress or life crisis and for identity reaffirmation. For these social, material, and religious reasons, ritual landscapes and pilgrimages to them are central to human existence in Mesoamerica.

Landscapes of Perception

Cultural landscapes exist by virtue of being perceived, experienced, and contextualized by people (Ashmore and Knapp 1999:1; Bowser and Zedeño 2009). Significant natural landscapes draw people's attention, influence behavior, and invite human interaction (Olsen 2010), especially if they impact our senses (Casey 1996). Lofty mountain summits, large cave mouths, high waterfalls, deep pools, and immense boulders attract people's attention because they are unique physical features that seem to require explanation.

These places affect the senses differently from everyday experiences, and the senses can be impaired or heightened in ritual landscapes. Landscapes like mountaintops, dark caves, and bodies of cool water provide settings for powerful human experiences related to sight, sound, touch, smell, and even taste if people consume water, earth, or food there (Ingold 1993), and while we cannot understand the exact past human responses to ritual landscapes, we can estimate them (Moore 2005:216; Whitley 2008). Ritual landscapes can be visually impressive, strenuous to access, dank and odiferous, excessively noisy due to winds and running water, or even tranquil. These places affect human actions, which is recognized through ceremony, mythology, and oral histories (Bowser and Zedeño 2009:5), and the experiences, histories, and rituals at these places serve to reproduce knowledge and proper behavior (Basso 1996; Tilley 2008:255–56).

Ritual locations are more significant if several unusual geographical features are found together, such as high cliffs with caves, springs, ancient ruins, or rock art (Tilley 2008:53). Likewise, people incorporate iconography, artifacts, and buildings found at ritual landscapes into their ceremonies and histories. In this regard, the art, artifacts, and architecture located at ritual landscapes, in addition to the impressive landscapes themselves, influence the thoughts and actions of people experiencing them (Olsen 2010:26–32; Tilley 2008:29–30, 255–58). For example, rock art depicting humans with animals invokes human relationships with the animal world, while images of warfare bring to mind the heroic deeds of ancestors. Images and artifacts at ritual landscapes not only influence people's actions, they also have meaning and symbolism that are culturally specific (Tilley 2008:47–48). Hence, caves with rock art may be significant places where initiation rites take place, but these ritual sites may also symbolize passage to the underworld or the houses of earth lords. Additionally, iconography related to animals may have been important for hunting rituals, yet the specific animals shown may alternatively represent important species used in feasting or the central beings in mythological narratives. Architecture in ritual landscapes may serve to heighten human experiences at these places; guide the actions and processions of people during ceremonies; house offerings, relics, and images; and symbolize elite power and control over the shrine and the participants in the ceremonies (Moore 1996, 2004, 2005). These observations underscore the importance of understanding the historical and cultural contexts of the areas being researched.

The movement of the human body within ritual landscapes is highly

significant for understanding their cultural and religious importance (Casey 1996). Movement relates to cultural ideals that influence the thoughts and actions of the participants, especially if they are on pilgrimage. For instance, pilgrims' linear movement or shifts from left to right while they are viewing rock art at shrines may reproduce the sun's travels across the sky or represent the journeys of ancestors and mythological heroes (Tilley 2008:256–58). The depiction of footprints or people walking or rowing boats may denote their actual traveling to and within the site (Tilley 2008:193, 256–57). Bodily movement in ritual landscapes also makes people aware of their physical surroundings and their senses, effectively strengthening the connections between them and their significant places. Ritual landscapes at Vingen, Norway, exemplify the influence of unique places on human experiences (Tilley 2008:53–111): Visually impressive, sheer rock faces emerge from a deep fjord (Tilley 2008:65–71). These rock faces, along with large boulders that visitors encounter while exploring the landscape, have been adorned with numerous carvings that enhance the visual splendor of this site. Vingen is a windy, wet, cold, and dark place most of the year, in contrast to areas a few kilometers away that are consistently sunny (Tilley 2008:63), and movement over the rocks, along the seashore, and through caves and rock-shelters in environmental conditions that tax the body along with the acute sensations of sight, sound, and touch heighten the effects of ceremonies at this place.

Communicating Places

Ritual landscapes and places of pilgrimage are special locales that possess religious power, connections to divine forces, and spiritual magnetism (Morinis 1992:17; Preston 1992:34; Singh 2002:9), and pilgrimage destinations in ritual landscapes are esteemed above ordinary religious spaces where deities are represented, such as household shrines and community temples. People visit ritual landscapes because they believe that deities and spiritual essences who can transform their lives actually reside there (Morinis 1992:17), including Mesoamerican earth and rain gods. These ritual landscapes exhibit traces of the resident deities and important cultural events in the form of boulders and springs, relics, rock art, and shrines (Preston 1992:41) or statues, footprints, and fragments of bone and clothing. These physical traces of spiritual essences invite people to come to their spiritual abodes in the landscape to communicate with them and receive their blessings. In many parts of the world, the belief in ritual landscapes as houses of deities, spirits, and

divine energies is quite common (Snead 2008:84). In ritual landscapes in India, places became significant through rituals undertaken by sages or religious specialists in addition to the spiritual force of their earth, water, and shrine constructions (Singh 2002:16). Hindus must physically enter a sacred space to communicate with the gods or to be in close proximity to them (Bhardwaj 1997:9; Singh 2002:21). The gods are attached to shrines visited by people who seek divine connections in their lives and to their surroundings. Pilgrimage to communicating places provides an ordered relationship with the spiritual essences and, ultimately, the cosmos (Bhardwaj 1997:14; Singh 2002:21, 28, 185).

People have used the concept of ritual landscapes to separate domestic and spiritual domains. In the Pueblo world of the southwest United States, for instance, communities formed cosmic centers surrounded by ritual landscapes that were associated with the abodes of spiritual forces and the ancestors (Snead 2008:83–84). Specific spiritual forces could be found in topographic features close to the community, but more powerful ones resided in distant places (Snead 2008:84). Ritual landscapes imbued with spiritual power can be dangerous places, and they must be approached cautiously through ceremonies (Snead 2008:84). The liminal periods of pilgrimage to ritual landscapes can be hazardous to the untrained and uninitiated. People who are impure or not properly purified for ceremony are also in danger at ritual landscapes (Monaghan 2000).

Maya people maintain active, reciprocal relationships with divine forces and ancestors, whom they believe influence their lives, communities, and the world around them. Mayas interact with invisible spiritual entities and their ancestors through what Astor-Aguilera (2009, 2010) calls "communicating objects," which include stone monuments, crosses, decorated objects, and carved images. Through communicating objects, Maya people provide offerings, prayers, and music for spiritual essences, or invisible nonhuman actors, in exchange for rain, fertility, and good fortune. Ritual leaders must be pure, knowledgeable, and of high social status during the encounter with potentially malevolent forces. Additionally, Maya rulers and male religious specialists often manage the communication with these spiritual forces, allowing them to maintain political and religious power (Astor-Aguilera 2009:171). Communication with what Mayas view as sentient and active spiritual forces occurs at their homes or places of contact in ritual landscapes (Astor-Aguilera 2009:160), including sink holes, hills, and shrines in distant forests. The Yucatec Maya call the forest-dwelling, agricultural tutelary deities

yuumil k'aaxo'ob (*yum k'aax*), or "forest lords," which include maize and rain gods (Astor-Aguilera 2009:172). These deities reside in people's ecological surroundings of which the spirits are part (Astor-Aguilera 2009:176, 181). The spiritual forces can be summoned through ceremonies with objects and at landscapes where they are tethered (Astor-Aguilera 2009:173), although these forces are also able to freely roam the cosmos (Astor-Aguilera 2009:182).

Mayas in highland Guatemala describe ritual landscapes as places where people are likely to encounter a spirit or a manifestation of spiritual energy, which can be anthropomorphic (Molesky-Poz 2006:111–12). According to the highland Maya, geographic features, including hills, caves, and rivers, have distinctive owners and energies that make communication with spiritual forces possible. These places operate as channels for communication between spirits and humans, where messages are exchanged efficaciously and rapidly (Molesky-Poz 2006:112). For instance, many highland Mayas view specific "pure" mountains as places where spirits manifest themselves effectively (Molesky-Poz 2006:107), and they contact their ancestors and spirits in certain ritual caves (Molesky-Poz 2006:110). Maya people link high elevations in general with caves; such places were thought of as divine beings themselves in addition to being residences of spiritual energies (Bassie-Sweet 1996:11). Mesoamerican peoples in general perceive the earth as being alive, and they compare it with aspects of the human body. Soil is equated with flesh, rocks are seen as bones, and water is likened to blood. Mountains are viewed as the heads of the earth, and caves are likened to wombs. This view of an animate physical world explains why ritual landscapes, like caves and mountains, are shown with faces, breath, and other signs of vitality in Mesoamerican art.

Landscapes, Identity, and Boundaries

Ritual landscapes help people structure social relations within and between communities (Ayres and Mauricio 1999:298, 309–13; Dillehay 2007) and express and reinforce their cultural identity (Ashmore and Knapp 1999:15–17). Visually prominent places, such as cliffs and caves, designate locations of past events, and they become associated with particular individuals, ancestors, and deities as well as myths, histories, social roles, and behaviors (Basso 1996). Often ritual landscapes symbolize the places associated with a people's creation, and people frequently categorize ritual landscapes as places of origin and renewal (Christie 2009; Staller 2008). In the Americas, these landscapes of creation are places of sustenance and abundance where important energies for the creation of people, animals, rain, and crops are contained.

Ritual landscapes of origin and creation can be linked to identity, boundary maintenance, and territory (Dillehay 2007). In the southwest United States, for example, ritual sites with rock art form a kind of symbolic communication that marks human action and landscape boundaries for those both inside and outside the community to see (Snead 2008:91). The distribution of these shrines and petroglyph sites is not random, and at times they are found near field houses and trails. In some cases, like in the area of Burnt Corn Pueblo, ritual landscapes and their rock art panels were meant to be viewed and used only by members of the community (Snead 2008:99). However, the distribution of rock art shrines surrounding the Tsikwaiye community points to the establishment of boundaries (Snead 2008:104–5). Here, a complex network of community shrines with rock art is found, including large shrines enclosed with walls and elaborate ritual landscapes near access routes to the community, all of which were highly visible. Community members could have chosen a number of places in which to construct their shrines, but they selected the areas where highly visible ritual landscapes delineated their territory. While the need to communicate community identity to members and to outsiders through the establishment of ritual landscapes was important, the proliferation of shrines with rock art used to delineate boundaries indicates obvious strains within the social and physical integrity of neighboring communities (Snead 2008:111–12).

Ritual landscapes in other parts of the world provide telling examples of the connections between native history, identity, place, and boundaries. Among the Andoque people, who are hunters, gatherers, and horticulturalists in the Colombian Amazon region, communal territory is forged through the knowledge and myths associated with mountain peaks, hills, rocks, deep parts of rivers, lakes, and other geographical features (Espinosa Arango and Andoque 1999:240–47). These places have religious significance and mark mythological events and the origins of all knowledge, including that of work, healing, dance, and ritual. Each place has a spiritual owner ("livings from the earth") and resident supernatural essences. Andoque male religious specialists communicate with the places and their owners through ritual offerings, payments, trance, and prayer. They maintain order, the well-being of the community, and permission for people to utilize resources, such as land, animals, and trails, by negotiating with the essences of the landscape through "payments" of prayer and offerings. These men control knowledge, territory, and community behaviors, such as when to hunt or fish and how to avoid illnesses. Through knowledge of the ritual landscape, each indigenous group manages its territory and boundaries even though a ritual specialist's larger

ceremonial landscape overlaps with the spaces of other ritual specialists. Andoque perceptions of landscape and territory come into play when they are negotiating land claims with other indigenous peoples and the Colombian state (Espinosa Arango and Andoque 1999:250–51). The construction of community territory in the local landscape determines the utilization of resources, types of production, and the organization of space; however, Colombian national law can challenge the notion of indigenous territory, since land and its resources are seen as belonging to the state. The creation of townships and officials to organize the land and its products disrupts the knowledge and power of the Andoque religious specialists, who in turn resist by maintaining ritual landscapes.

In another example, aboriginal land use and personal identity in the Barunga region of Australia are closely tied to cultural perceptions of the landscape (Smith 1999). Studies of the Barunga landscape focus on the linkages between territory, ritual places, social space and networks, mythology, and indigenous land rights: human action shapes the landscape, and in turn the landscape shapes human behavior. Social affiliations with places follow language, lineage, place naming, and community (Smith 1999:193). The associations between the specific topographical features of ritual landscapes and social groups were formed during the era of creation by ancestral beings. When people move through their landscape, they are reminded of the creation of places by the ancestors, and they reflect on their identity and their responsibilities. Thus, kinship, land, inheritance, and religion cannot be separated in aboriginal societies. Because people can access the power of the ancestors in the ritual landscape, these places, often landscape features with ancient and modern rock art, are potentially dangerous and can affect the lives of people. Movement in the landscape is taken seriously, and people must negotiate with the landscape and its resident spiritual beings to avoid harm. Only people of specific social groups that are linked to the ancestral beings can visit these places and perform rituals to contact them. Colonialism, cross-cultural interaction, and negotiations over territory and land use in Australia are all mediated through aboriginal ritual landscapes (Smith 1999:199–202). People of European descent cannot visit ritual landscapes to connect with ancestral beings for they have no social or religious ties to these places. Aboriginal people view foreigners as "living on top of the land rather than in the land," thus outsiders do not view ritual landscapes as being imbued with power, history, and descent (Smith 1999:200–201). In modern land disputes, aboriginal people legally claim hereditary access to land

through knowledge of its place-names, ancestral beings, and mythological events (Smith 1999:201–2). However, aboriginal groups have allowed for the creation of parks at some places so that they can be properly maintained, which is important for teaching children about their heritage (Smith 1999:200).

Connections between ritual landscapes, identity, and community boundaries are apparent in Mesoamerica, and they are clear in the Maya area. Mesoamerican people incorporate ritual landscapes into their creation myths and explanations of world order. They also maintain community identity and territorial boundaries through the use of pilgrimage shrines. These special "communicating places" impact the human senses and shape ritual experiences.

MESOAMERICAN RITUAL LANDSCAPES

Here I introduce the ritual landscapes that appear in the Maya case studies of subsequent chapters. I will provide examples of ritual landscapes and point out their ceremonial functions. Archaeological, historical, and ethnographic research has shown that mountains, cliffs, boulders, ancient ruins, bodies of water (springs, lakes, rivers, and pools), and islands have been significant ritual landscapes from ancient times to the present in Mesoamerica (Aguilar-Moreno 2009:57–58; Pohl and Byland 1990; Vogt 1981). Oftentimes, the most important ritual landscapes in this culture area have a combination of significant geographical features, such as deep caves containing pools or mountains containing caves and springs. These unique landscape features in Mesoamerica point to the places of origin of gods and people, deeds of mythical beings, locales of past events, and abodes of ancestors and deities who must be contacted to preserve the world order (Bassie-Sweet 2008; Carrasco and Sessions, eds. 2007; Heyden 1981; Reilly 1999; Tate 2008), and various Maya groups call ritual landscapes and the places where deities and ancestors reside "god houses" or "stone houses" (Adams and Brady 1994; McGee 1990).

Ritual landscapes are central in the creation of indigenous social identity in Mesoamerica (see figs. 1.7 and 1.8). Place-based myth, history, and ritual instruct people about their communities, very much like a "spatial pedagogy" (Hamman 2002:353), and their interactions with gods and ancestors at ritual landscapes further embed people in their territories. In

native documents and in pilgrimage rituals, ritual landscapes mark community boundaries (Pohl and Byland 1990; Villela 2009:335–38). Deities connected to specific communities and lineages are also important in Mesoamerica. The connections between people, local deities, and ancestors buried nearby have formed spheres of interaction likened to "congregations" of people and spiritual energies (Monaghan 1995:9) or "co-inhabitation" (Hamman 2002:354). Related to the connection between people and tutelary deities is the concept of "landscape of origins" (Christie 2009; Staller 2008). Indigenous people across Mesoamerica believe that their ancestors, patron deities, and the supernatural energies responsible for life and human existence originated in ritual landscapes. The places of origin are consistently mountains or caves, or a combination of the two, that contain or are surrounded by water. Ancestors and deities emerged from the womb of the mountain, conceptualized as a cave, fertile from its waters. The Aztec maize god and the sun, for instance, originated in caves in mountains from where they brought life and food to people (Aguilar-Moreno 2009:57, 75). Matters of both everyday life and the continuation of the world and human existence have long been tied to ritual landscapes. As we will see, indigenous pilgrimage to ritual landscapes activates the relationships between people, places, and spiritual forces.

Mountains

Mountains, especially those associated with caves and bodies of water (fig. 3.1), have been ritual landscapes par excellence since the beginning of Mesoamerican civilization (Brady and Ashmore 1999; Heyden 1981; Reilly 1999; Trombold 1991:155). Hills and mountains are among the most common ritual landscapes for Aztec, Mixtec, Huichol, and Maya peoples, who have named temples, settlements, and other places after ritually important mountains and constructed shrines on the bases, slopes, and summits of these prominent landscapes (Villela 2009). Mountains are important because they are unique geographical features that can be seen from great distances. Climbing them places demands on the human body, and people are impacted by the panoramic views, cooler temperatures, winds, solitude, and the altitude of mountaintops. Mountains in Mesoamerica frequently have springs or caves with water, high forests with economically useful plants and animals, and clouds that envelop their peaks. These features led to the association of mountains with water, riches, spiritual essences, and life itself.

Mountains are seen as fertile, which explains why Mesoamerican peoples classify them as male or female and pair them in mythology (Villela 2009). Mountains are also associated with rain making, agricultural abundance, earth and water deities, and ancestors (Taube 2004). These important ritual landscapes have been seen as places of sustenance (Tonacatepetl, "Mountain of Our Sustenance") by the Aztec people and as "stone warehouses [of valued things]" (*tepetlacalco*) in contemporary Nahua societies (Grigsby 1986:164, 177). Mountains also contain the soul energies of animals and people (Pitarch Ramón 1996) and connect the earth with the sky, clouds, sun, and heavens (Monaghan 1995:97, 108; Taube 2004).

Mesoamerican societies incorporated mountains as ideal ritual landscapes into their mythological and historical narratives. For instance, Aztecs in central Mexico believed that their ancient homeland of Aztlan consisted of an island mountain on a pristine lake (see fig. 2.10; fig. 3.2), and Aztec codices show Aztlan as a natural mountain with a temple or shrine on it. This mountain, called Culhuacan, was filled with openings, caves, caverns, and springs that were the homes of Aztec ancestors (Elzey 1991:110, 129). Aztec mountains were believed to contain water, hence their name *altepeme*, in addition to harboring earth and rain deities (Villela 2009:331–32). The island mountain of Aztlan was the prototypical symbol of community unity, identity, and governance in ancient Mexico (altepetl, "water mountain"; Elzey 1991:128). This water mountain was not thought to be solid earth and rock, but hollow or chambered, allowing it to hold vast quantities of the things required for human existence, including water, maize, and trade items. The concept of the altepetl allowed communities to access an abundance of water, food, and resources through ritual.

The main temple, or Templo Mayor (fig. 3.3), at the Aztec island capital of Tenochtitlan in Lake Tetzcoco symbolized Coatepetl (Serpent Mountain), the mythical place where the Aztecs' patron god Huitzilopochtli was born and ascended in the Aztec pantheon (López Austin and López Luján 2009). At the same time, this artificial mountain represented the ancestral water mountain of Aztlan from which Huitzilopochtli originally migrated. According to Aztec sources, this temple was erected on two rocks and two caves filled with water, which marked the center of the universe (Elzey 1991:128). The Aztecs adorned the Templo Mayor with serpent bodies and heads flanking the stairway to represent Coatepetl, and they erected two superstructures with imagery related to Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc, the ancient earth, rain, storm, and war god. The imagery effectively

Figure 3.1. A prominent mountain as a ritual landscape, Teotihuacan, central Mexico.

represents Mesoamerican beliefs about the connections between serpents, mountains, caves, and rain. Rituals at the temple reenacted the ascendancy of Huitzilopochtli as the Aztec patron god and provided offerings so that Tlaloc would bring the rains and agricultural abundance. People from around Mexico would arrive at the Templo Mayor to witness these rituals.

Aztec people also maintained shrines on real mountains, such as Chapultepec, Mount Tlaloc, Tepoztlan, Tetzcotzingo, Popocatepetl, and many others (Harvey 1991:96; Hobgood 1964:47; Martínez Marín 1972; Pasztory 1998; Piho and Hernández 1972; see fig. 2.9). Elite Aztec pilgrims performed rituals on mountains with springs in central Mexico to communicate with supernatural forces and ask for rain and bountiful harvests. For example, archaeologists have identified temples utilized by Aztec pilgrims for rain, water, and agricultural rituals on the mountain of Iztaccihuatl, one of which rests in an alpine lake (Montero García 2009:33–34). Ceramic vessels depicting Tlaloc (the storm god), incense balls, and lightning staffs were deposited by Aztec pilgrims in the lake. Another central Mexican alpine pilgrimage shrine was dedicated to Mixcoatl (Cloud Serpent), a sky god

Figure 3.2. The mountain on the island of Aztlan with an Aztec pilgrim or ancestor on its summit (Codex Aubin, fol. 3).

associated with hunting, on Cerro Zacatepetl (Broda 2009:176). Aztec rituals for rain and water also took place near a cliff on Popocatepetl, the nearby volcano that contains Postclassic rock art designs that depict Tlaloc, Quetzalcoatl, a temple, water drops spilling out of a vessel, and other deities and symbols important for rituals related to rain, the fertility of the earth, and agricultural abundance (Piho and Hernández 1972).

Aztec pilgrims also climbed mountains near Toluca to cast offerings, including paper, copal incense, and cotton mantels, into the cold, clear mountaintop lakes for their gods of rain, water, and agriculture (Kubler 1984:13; Martínez Marín 1972:168). Divers have recently recovered many of these offerings, including wooden staffs in the shape of lightning bolts, ceramic vessels, and finely crafted artifacts in jade and obsidian (Junco 2010; Montero García 2009:33). Domestic architecture and artifacts have not been reported at these ritual locales. Aztec elites also made pilgrimages to prominent hills at Chapultepec and Malinalco, which contain shrines. Chapultepec Hill contains springs that provided water to Aztec settlements via aqueducts, and the Aztecs created temple shrines and rock carvings depicting kings on the summit (Pasztory 1998:127–28). Chapultepec was

Figure 3.3. A feathered serpent emerging from the symbolic mountain of the Aztec Templo Mayor, Tenochtitlan, central Mexico.

associated with the early homes of the Aztecs and the first rulers. Thus, this shrine was important for rain and fertility ceremonies together with rites associated with ancestor worship, community identity, and territory. The temples of Malinalco, which were dedicated to earth and cave deities, were carved by Aztec conquerors in the bedrock of a ritual cliff in the form of caves with three-dimensional rock art (Aguilar-Moreno 2009; Pasztory 1998:135–38). Wall paintings at the site show processions of Aztec warriors, possibly arriving as pilgrims. Hidden in the hills far from the Aztec capital, Malinalco and the rites conducted in its temples symbolized the Aztec presence and sovereignty over peripheral lands. Depictions of enemy temples burning symbolized conquest in ancient Mesoamerican art, thus the creation of shrines in foreign lands established Aztec rulership through Aztec symbols in the landscape and the usurpation of deities found there. These sites were important for rituals for rain, earth, and water deities as well as ancestor worship. The importance of ritual mountains in Aztec culture parallels religious beliefs throughout Mesoamerica, especially in the Maya region.

Maya Ritual Mountains

Mountains, hills, and volcanoes have always been key ritual landscapes for Maya societies (fig. 3.4; Bassie-Sweet 2008; Brady and Ashmore 1999; Brady and Prufer 2005). Like the Aztecs with their concept of the altepetl, as discussed previously, colonial period Mayas in Yucatán referred to social groups, territories, and hills or temples (artificial mountains) with the term *tzucub* or *tzucul* meaning "hill," "ruined temple mound," and "province" or "parcel" (Restall 1997:24; see fig. 2.11). Over time, Mayas have referred to communities and social boundaries using the names of local mountains. Furthermore, among the ancient Maya, Flower Mountain was an abode of gods and ancestors that served as a place for the resurrection of the dead and their ascent to the paradisiacal realm of the sun (Taube 2004). This mountain contained caves that bridged the watery underworld and the celestial realm (Taube 2004:81–83). In ancient Maya imagery, Flower Mountain emerges from standing water filled with fish, essentially representing an island. This mountain is an axis mundi where dead souls emerge from underground tombs and travel to the sun. A reference to a burial at Piedras Negras describes a noble buried in the "5 flower? (*hanab*?) mountain/temple" (witz; Stuart and Houston 1994:45), which may have been a funerary structure viewed as a symbolic cave in an artificial mountain.

Clear references to ritual mountains can be seen in Maya art, architecture, and inscriptions. The Maya adorned their buildings with long-snouted masks representing animate mountains and, inside the mountains, caves (Taube 2004:84). And Maya temples themselves symbolized ritual mountains in the landscape, particularly Flower Mountain, which was associated with creation, the sustenance of human societies, otherworldly paradise, and the homes of the ancestors. Maya art shows elites visiting, sitting or standing on, and carrying out rituals at mountains (Stuart and Houston 1994:10, 82–83), and these images effectively demonstrate the connection between ritual landscapes, elites, and territory. Maya hieroglyphic texts further indicate that elites came from regions named after mountains and that many Maya polities were linked to ritual mountains (Stuart and Houston 1994:20–26). These texts discuss elite rituals at mountains and temples (Stuart and Houston 1994:82–86), which were important places for interaction with spiritual essences and thus the maintenance of the cosmos. The placement of stone monuments and ritual architecture at shrines on mountains indicates that Mayas made pilgrimage circuits to these places. Several carved stelae

Figure 3.4. Maya sacred mountain near the ruins of Copán, Honduras. Note white limestone stela near the summit (black pointer, top, center) and river at its base (tree line, bottom).

and altars on the mountains surrounding Copán, Honduras (Fash and Davis-Salazar 2006:133–34; Sharer and Traxler 2006:118–19, 477), for instance, delineate a pilgrimage route (see fig. 6.6). The ancient Maya placed the stelae to mark mountaintop shrines, one of which has constructions and artificial depressions that hold water, and the inscriptions on the stelae mention caves and sources of water that could have been located on the mountain summits (Fash and Davis-Salazar 2006:134). The Copán ruler who commissioned these monuments, Butz Imix, may have organized pilgrimages to these mountain shrines with their monuments for rain rituals in order to legitimize his rule and claims to territory around the political center.

Cliffs

Cliffs and exposed bedrock are similar to caves, boulders, and mountains in Mesoamerican ritual landscapes (fig. 3.5; Grove, ed. 1987; Stone 2003). In fact, they are among the more ceremonially significant places in this culture area. Ritual cliffs are frequently found on the tops or sides of mountains, near caves, and have boulders at their bases and summits. Cliffs are viewed as the doorways to the abodes of spiritual essences, and they functioned as canvases for rock art. People carved and painted designs on cliffs where they would be highly visible to large numbers of worshipers. The visibility of cliffs and their designs have made them publicly oriented ritual landscapes, as opposed to caves and mountaintops, which are often more private. Therefore, the beliefs, ceremonies, and material assemblages associated with cliffs are often different. But regardless of their function and meaning, cliffs were among the first ritual places established by indigenous people in the New World, as seen in early rock art panels. Indeed, cliffs with rock art dating to preceramic or archaic times (ca. 6000–2000 B.C.) are abundant in northern and western Mexico (Braniff 2001; Mendiola Galván 2005) and are frequently paired with springs, rivers, caves, or mountains. The rock art motifs include animals, humans, handprints, and geometric shapes. Cliffs probably served as places for hunting rituals, which were crucial for Mesoamerican subsistence, and may have been viewed as the homes of the master of the animals or the earth lords, if we interpret their ritual functions through ethnographic analogy. The abstract symbols and handprints in early rock art may indicate that initiation and healing rites, or perhaps ceremonies performed by religious specialists to communicate with the spiritual forces, occurred at these places. The presence of hand- and footprints in the rock art at cliff shrines, in addition to the paucity of domestic artifacts, points to their function as pilgrimage destinations.

The basalt cliffs at Chalcatzingo in Morelos, Mexico, are among the best-known examples of ritual landscapes in ancient Mesoamerica, and people carved many high-quality images on the cliffs and boulders during the height of Olmec civilization in the Preclassic period (see fig. 2.14). The images show clouds with raindrops falling from them, caves full of seated people or deities, human sacrifice, plants, and animals such as jaguars and serpents (Grove and Angulo 1987). Iconography showing cave entrances at the site shows the maws of a great serpent associated in Mesoamerica with the earth, rain, and caves (Grove 2006). Elites commissioned the stone carvings, and

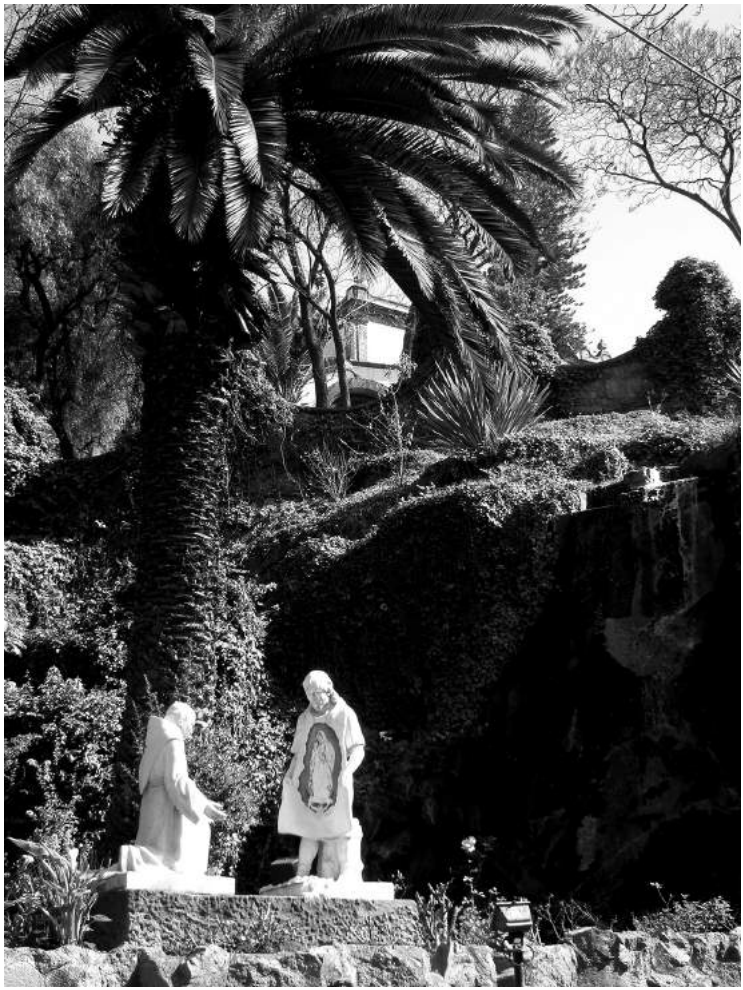

Figure 3.5. Springs flowing over a cliff on the summit of Tepeyacac Hill at the pilgrimage shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico City.

they organized rituals for rain and agricultural fertility. Rock paintings at Chalcatzingo, which may date from Classic to more recent times, show human figures, animals, handprints, female genitalia, and geometric designs such as spirals, circles, and lines (Apostolides 1987; see fig. 2.15), which are commonly found in Mesoamerican caves (Stone 1995).

Another example of a Mesoamerican ritual cliff is located on the banks of the Tomatlan River in Jalisco, west Mexico. La Peña Pintada cliff, at a high

point on the river, supports a large granite overhang with numerous red designs (Mountjoy 1982). The rock paintings more than likely date from Postclassic to historic times based on their style and the chronology of the sites in the region. These pictographs show human stick figures, fish, eye motifs, vertical and horizontal wavy lines, a possible sun shield, and numerous geometric shapes, such as circles, diamonds, and rectangles. Mountjoy (1982:116–21) interpreted the horizontal lines as cloud serpents or possibly gourd vines, the vertical lines as rain or rain serpents, and the circles as eye motifs based on the religious symbolism of local Huichol people, who believe that caves and cliffs were places for communication with the supernatural world. In some cases, wavy vertical lines appear like tears from the eyes and faces of Tlaloc, the Mesoamerican rain and storm god (Mountjoy 1982:118). The eye motifs may also symbolize the power to see the divine, the faces of the gods, or the gods seeing the worshipers and their offerings, which parallel Huichol beliefs (Mountjoy 1982:118–19). Mountjoy (1982:121–24) also suggests that the designs record astronomical observations, most likely related to the movement of the Sun, Venus, and other stars and constellations that were sighted on the horizon from the cliff.

Aztec people also decorated cliffs with carved and painted images, and they chose cliffs at mountain shrines. They located the cliff shrines throughout their territory to legitimize their rule and to demonstrate their ties to supernatural beings associated with ritual landscapes (Pasztory 1998:125). For instance, the Aztec cliff relief at Cerro de la Malinche, overlooking the ruins of Tula, Hidalgo, shows the maize-water goddess, who may have resided in the cliff, holding a maize plant while surrounded by shells, wavy lines, and dots representing water or rain. This cliff relief also depicts the deity-ancestor Quetzalcoatl, who is flanked by a large undulating feathered serpent (Pasztory 1998:125–27). Another cliff near a spring on a mountain in Guerrero exhibits an ancient carving at a shrine, perhaps executed by earlier artists from Teotihuacan. This shrine is linked to the deity Texayac (Face in/of Rock) by local Nahua people, who still leave offerings there (Villela 2009:333n3). Rock carvings on cliffs at the Tetzcotzingo hill in central Mexico illustrate the Aztec rain god Tlaloc and possibly the maize-water goddess as well (Pasztory 1998:129–31; Townsend 1982). This hill contained a spring, an aqueduct, canals, and artificial pools. With its art and hydraulic features, Tetzcotzingo represented the Aztec realms of sky, earth, and water, and it was an important site for the worship of rain, earth, and agricultural deities (Pasztory 1998:131–32). Aztec rulers also symbolized direct connections to

their territory by placing portraits of ancestors on cliffs and carrying out rituals to communicate with deities, especially Tlaloc. This type of rock art shrine can also be seen at Chapultepec hill (Pasztory 1998:127–28) and on a painted cliff at the volcano Popocatepetl (Piho and Hernández 1972).

Cliffs as Maya Ritual Landscapes

Cliffs were ritually important for the ancient Maya (figs. 3.6 and 3.7). I consider cliffs as ritual landscapes separate from mountains since exposed bedrock cliffs can only be scaled with ropes, they contain rock art, and they had different ceremonial functions. Many cliffs have cave entrances. The ritual importance of cliffs for Maya people stems from their tall, bare rock faces, which are unusual landscape features. The Maya site of Uxbenka, Belize, for instance, demonstrates this importance. Two kilometers to the south of the Uxbenka site core, a one-hundred-meter-high limestone cliff projects out of the surrounding forest (Prufer et al. 2011:214, 217). This cliff contains a small cave shrine, Kayuko Naj Tunich, where Maya rituals were concentrated. What is intriguing is that the public constructions at Uxbenka are oriented toward the cliff face and cave (Prufer et al. 2011:214). Furthermore, the ancient Maya constructed a masonry stairway and doorway to access the cave (Prufer et al. 2011:215–16). They also placed wooden construction beams in the cave and plastered some of its walls to create the shrine. The founding of Uxbenka and cave shrine construction occurred in the Early Classic period, indicating that Maya elites utilized this ritual landscape during the creation of their polity and territory (Prufer et al. 2011:215, 219). One can imagine that Maya pilgrims arrived at the site, gathered in the public plazas oriented toward the cliff, and then proceeded to the shrine. A similar cliff shrine in central Belize called the "Thumb" consists of a limestone peak resembling a white skyscraper rising conspicuously from the dark forest (McAnany 2010:77–78). This tall karst cone, like others in the area, exhibits material remains of numerous Maya ritual visits. The cliff contains open passages, and these cavelike features contain artifacts and rock art. The offerings include fragments of ceramic vessels, animal bone, and shell artifacts that date from Classic to Terminal Classic times, and red handprints adorn the passages.

An important Maya ritual cliff, called La Casa de las Golondrinas, is located at the base of Agua Volcano on the Guacalate River and adjacent to the Quilizimate Lake near the town of Ciudad Vieja in the Guatemalan highlands (Robinson 2010:138). The impressive thirty-meter-high and

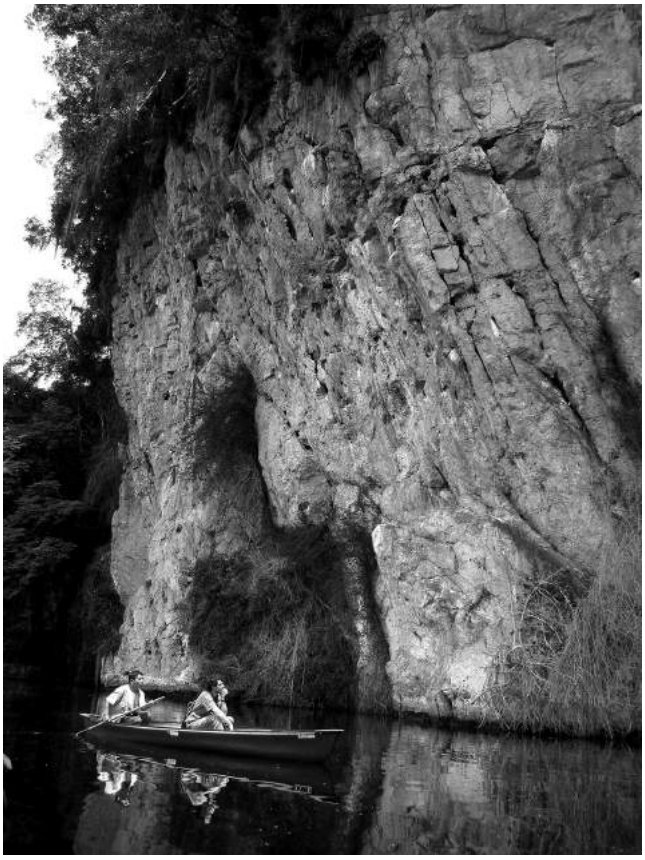

Figure 3.6. Maya ritual cliff at Lake Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico.

five-hundred-meter-long cliffs have three natural springs, and one, El Salto (the Waterfall), is associated with three main clusters of red paintings on the rock face above it, some of which show influence from Postclassic central Mexico (Robinson 2010:142; Robinson and Ware 2002). One design represents the body and head of a serpent with feathers on its back facing east (Robinson 2010:141–42), possibly a water serpent. Another image resembles the face of the rain god Tlaloc, who was worshiped in shrines in central Mexico described previously (fig. 3.8; Robinson and Ware 2002:drawing A-15). Maya artists also painted human handprints, footprints, faces, an eye, and stick figures (Robinson 2010; Robinson and Ware 2002:drawings B-11, 16, 17), along with monkeys, alligators, birds, turtles, butterflies, and other

Figure 3.7. Springwater flowing over a ritual cliff at Chechem Ha Falls near Chechem Ha Cave, Cayo District, Belize (photograph by James Meierhoff).

animals. Additional designs include sun symbols on the east side of the cliff and round markings that signify shields and conquest (Robinson 2010). A site found nearby, which may have been a pilgrimage shrine or an outlying settlement of the protohistoric Maya center of Bulbux-ya (Running Water/Spring), is perhaps named after the springs or river near this ritual cliff (Robinson 2010:131). The Maya utilized this site over a long period from the Preclassic to the present for fertility, rain, and hunting rituals (Robinson and Ware 2002). La Casa de las Golondrinas was situated on the periphery of two competing Postclassic Maya capitals, and it was located in a strategic area of the expanding Kaqchikel state (Robinson 2010:136, 146). The Kaqchikel Maya

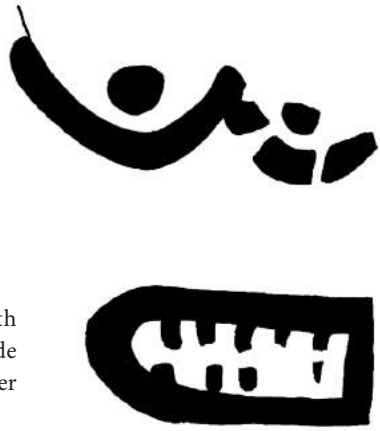

Figure 3.8. Possible Tlaloc (rain and earth god) face on a Maya ritual cliff, La Casa de las Golondrinas, highland Guatemala (after Robinson and Ware 2002:112).

of the region state that this site is associated with the birth of their people, their ancestors, world creation, and the abode of a powerful mountain guardian (Robinson 2010:138–39, 146–47).

Boulders, Monoliths, and Rock Outcrops

Boulders, monoliths, and bedrock outcrops mark ritual landscapes across Mesoamerica, and they are often associated with caves, cliffs, and ruins (Pasztory 1998; Stone 2003). Indigenous people have long carried out rituals at unique boulders and rock outcrops, which are viewed as the homes of supernatural forces or deities or as ancestors who have been turned to stone (Vogt 1981). Artists sculpted and painted designs on boulders (fig. 3.9), and they carved large rocks into monuments, sometimes in three-dimensional form. These large stones were viewed by Mesoamerican societies as "communicating objects" for contacting the spiritual realm (Astor-Aguilera 2010), and they were quarried and then transported to distant sites. The colossal carved heads, altars, stelae, and thrones at the Olmec sites of San Lorenzo and La Venta (Reilly 1999), the immense water goddess sculptures at Teotihuacan (Pasztory 1997:88, fig. 6.3), and the large sculptures at the Aztec Templo Mayor in Tenochtitlan (Pasztory 1998) exemplify the importance of carved boulders as communicating objects.

My focus in this section will be on boulders and monoliths in Mesoamerican pilgrimage and ritual places in terms of their importance for rock art. Boulders were among the earliest ritual landscapes in Mesoamerica:

Figure 3.9. Boulder sculpture with Tlaloc images and water channel at Bilbao, Guatemala.

some of the earliest rock paintings by preceramic or archaic hunters can be found on boulders (Braniff 2001). Rituals at these shrines may have been related to success in hunting, bringing the rains, initiation rites, and group boundaries. The Aztecs later marked the extent of their governance through carved boulders. One monumental boulder relief at Cuernavaca in Morelos shows a shield with arrows, or atlatl darts, and a banner, which symbolized Aztec conquest (Pasztory 1998:125).

Boulders with rock carvings occur at Formative period Olmec sites in different parts of Mesoamerica (Ekholm-Miller 1973; Navarrete 1974; Sharer and Traxler 2006:169). One of the largest concentrations of Olmec carved and painted boulders is at Chalcatzingo, Mexico (Apostolides 1987; Grove, ed. 1987). The boulders rest near shrines at cliffs, caves, and outcrops of bedrock or are found on level terrain. Rock carvings at Chalcatzingo were placed in a "processional arrangement" to be viewed in order along the course of rain runoff channels (Grove 1999:260). The designs include steps, spirals, lines, other geometric shapes, and animals. Monument 1, "El Rey," depicts rain clouds over a seated noble within an animated cave marked with sprouting vegetation, and Monument 5 shows a human being devoured by a crocodile-serpent (Grove, ed. 1987:115–17, 122). The designs can be linked to the control

of rain and agricultural fertility, and contemporary populations in the area connect storms and water flowing down the hills at the site with rain serpents (Grove, ed. 1987:1).

Another famous Olmec carving (Monument 13) at La Venta, Tabasco, is a worked boulder (fig. 3.10). The prepared face of this stone shows a walking nobleman called the "Ambassador" (Rice 2007:96–97, fig. 5.14) or the "Walker." Importantly, a footprint or "travel/arrival" glyph appears to his left. I label this image the "Pilgrim" since it depicts a noble carrying a banner and arriving on foot to La Venta in order to participate in rituals at the site. Interestingly, other Olmec monuments have carved footprints near their central images that denote travel or the presence of pilgrims or deities (Gutiérrez and Pye 2010; Tate 1995:62–63). The site of La Venta, which had an artificial mountain, large structures flanking a central plaza, and numerous stone monuments on an island in a swampy area, served as a pilgrimage site for Olmec people as well as more recent worshipers.

Boulders with carvings at Maltrata, Veracruz, were found on the slope of the mountain of Pico de Orizaba (Morante López 2009:55–56; Ringle et al. 1998:196, fig. 9a), a source of the obsidian that was traded across Mesoamerica. On one of these monoliths, ancient artists carved a scene showing a seated woman who speaks while holding an object, possibly an offering. In front of her stands a male warrior holding a torch. Calendar dates placed below the figures indicate when the rituals took place. Possible footprints rise between these two figures and just to the left of the warrior's face. On the other side of this monument a carved design shows a temple alongside the image of Quetzalcoatl—a feathered serpent with a large star or Venus symbol attached to its side. This carved relief may mark a shrine dedicated to Quetzalcoatl that pilgrims visited on this mountain, which was called "Mountain of the Star" (Morante López 2009:54–56). The boulders probably indicated the place of ascent on the mountain, as do other boulders with rock art in central Mexico (Aranda Monroy 2009:251).

Boulders and Monoliths in Maya Culture

The ancient Maya carved their stelae and altars from cliffs and exposed bedrock (see fig. 2.28). They could have relied on wood or stucco for their art, but they choose stone as a permanent medium and because of its attachment to the landscape. The huge zoomorphic altars carved from boulders and the impressive stone stelae at the Classic Maya site of Quirigua are excellent examples of

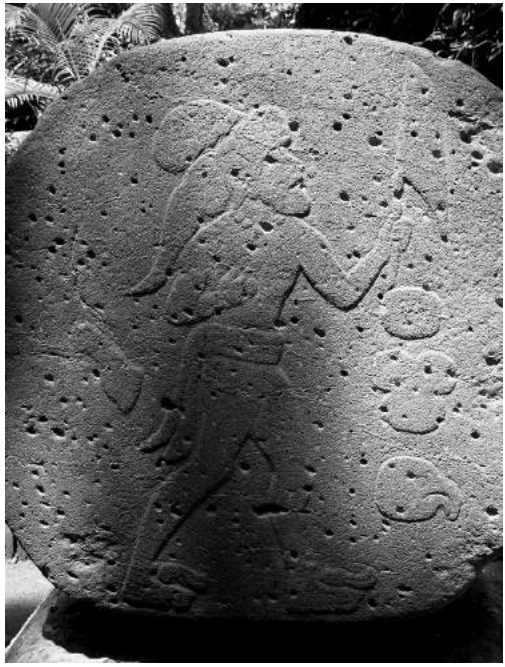

Figure 3.10. The Olmec "pilgrim" on a boulder (Monument 13), La Venta, Tabasco, Mexico. Note the footprint glyph to the left of the walking figure carrying a banner as well as the pilgrims' marks (grooving and drilling) on top of the monument.

large stones as ritual objects (fig. 3.11). These monumental stones, which served as thrones or altars, contain imagery related to the earth, water, mountains, creation, and elites in ancient Maya cosmology (Looper 2003:177–93; Stone 1995:24–26). Zoomorph B, for instance, shows the bearded Maya king K'ak' Tiliw emerging from the Maya earth crocodile while floating in a primordial sea at the time of world creation (Looper 2003:172–76). This monument represents the Maya mountain of origin where gods are reborn (Looper 2003:176), or it may depict a mythological island in a primordial sea. The imagery on this sculpture links the Maya ruler with powers of fertility, rebirth, and transformation and connects him to the supernatural world through a portal, which is the earth crocodile, a cave, or the monument itself (Looper 2003:172, 175). An interesting detail on the monument is the human feet carved on the lower jaw of the crocodile that flanks the emerging ruler, symbolizing the royal Maya path through this supernatural portal (Looper 2003:172–73).

Many early carvings in the Maya area are found on boulders, including Preclassic monuments at Takalik Abaj in Guatemala and Izapa in coastal Chiapas (Sharer and Traxler 2006). At one site in Guatemala, archaeologists encountered an altar constructed around an isolated boulder without carvings (Termer 1961). This construction had a purely ceremonial function, since indigenous pilgrims visited the boulder shrine and left rows of painted ceramic vessels nearby, like at Takalik Abaj (Schieber de Lavarreda and Orrego Corzo 2010; see fig. 2.27). In another case, several boulders rest on a plain adjacent to hills near the ancient Maya site of Copán, Honduras (fig. 3.12). They represent an unusual landscape feature since they are isolated from other topographic features. These boulders exhibit multiple petroglyphs on their surfaces, including spirals, cavities, lines, and faces, and thus had special religious importance for ancient inhabitants in the region.

Caves

The recent extensive literature on ritual caves demonstrates the growth in research on this topic (Brady and Prufer 2005). Caves, which are abundant in Mesoamerica, are among the most important of ritual places, and they symbolize many things in indigenous beliefs (fig. 3.13). Perhaps their unique features and effects on the senses led the earliest people in Mesoamerica to utilize them for rituals and burials. Caves are unusual, powerful geographic features that are seen as points of access to supernatural worlds and the divine beings that inhabit them, particularly earth, rain, and ancestral deities (Brady and Prufer 2005). They link the earth with both the underworld

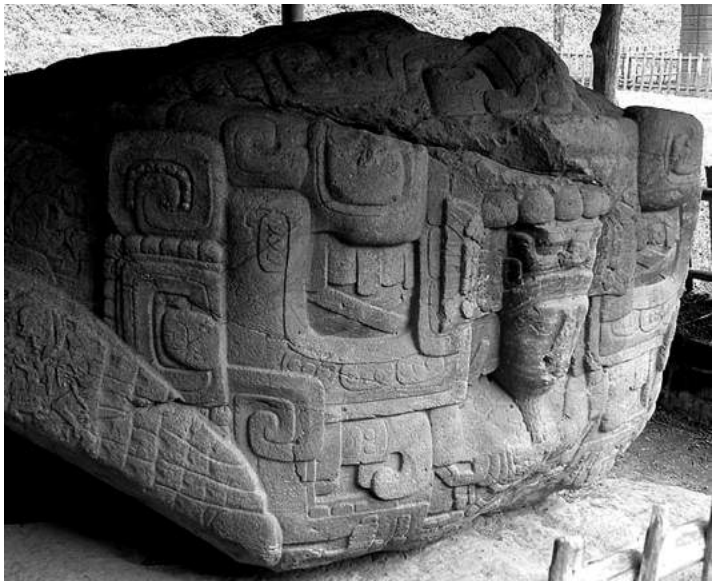

Figure 3.11. Maya carved zoomorphic boulder at Quirigua, Guatemala.

and the sky (Williams 2009:70, 87). Mesoamerican people associate caves with rain, fertility, birth, creation, death, gods, mountains, and pure ritual space (Grigsby 1986; Williams 2009:69–71). Caves are generally thought to be the origin places of the current world—wombs in the earth from which people, deities, water, and crops are generated (Brady 1988; Brady and Prufer 2005; Williams 2009:71)—and they are the sites of past mythological events. Because of their religious and mythological importance to Mesoamerican societies, caves serve as places for frequent ritual, including initiation rites and rites for rain, good harvests, and curing.

In Aztec culture Tlalocan was an underworld place accessed by caves. Tlalocan was the abode of Tlaloc, the Mesoamerican rain, earth, and storm god, and the place of sustenance, natural riches, and the souls of living things (Heyden 2005:25–27; López Austin 1997). Caves also lead to the land of the dead, called Mictlan in Aztec Nahuatl (Heyden 2005:31). Of great importance to the Aztecs was a mythical place called Chicomostoc, the mountain with a seven-chambered cave at its base from which the ancestors emerged onto the earth. This ritual cave was illustrated in Aztec and central Mexican codices that treat cultural origins because it was a central symbolic place related to community history and identity. The codices show the Aztecs' Chichimec

Figure 3.12. Boulder with rock art near the Copán Valley, Honduras. Note faces, water channels, pockmarks, and pilgrims' grooves.

ancestors leaving the cave at Chicomostoc as well as people visiting caves to provide offerings for deities and ancestors residing there (Carrasco and Sessions, eds. 2007; Johansson 2007; see fig. 2.10).

Similarly, Mixtec nobles from Oaxaca believed that they were descendants of divine ancestors born from caves in the earth and sky (Williams 2009:80). Mixtec nobles were connected to a living landscape that created them and gave them the power to rule (Pohl and Byland 1990; Williams 2009:69). This perception of a living landscape explains why Mixtec and Mesoamerican iconography in general shows caves and mountains as animate beings (Grove 2006; Stuart and Houston 1994; Williams 2009:83). In Mixtec painted manuscripts, artists showed elite rituals in caves where deities and oracles were given offerings in fulfillment of ceremonial obligations for the continuation of life (see fig. 2.17). Mixtec codices also depict elite coronation rituals in caves, in some cases after new territories were conquered or regional alliances cemented (Williams 2009:81–85). In a specific example, Mixtec people placed the mummy bundles of their rulers in a cave near Chalcatongo, where the dead communed with the divine forces that created them. These burials made the cave a major pilgrimage site in Oaxaca (Martínez Marín 1972:175–76).

Figure 3.13. Lacandon Maya ritual cave in a cliff on the shore of Lake Petha, Chiapas, Mexico (photograph by Marvin Vann, courtesy of Albion College Archives and Special Collections).

Early ceremonies and pilgrimages to caves in Mesoamerica were carried out by Olmec people in Preclassic times. The caves of Juxtlahuaca and Oxtotitlan in Guerrero, Mexico, for example, contain Olmec rock paintings perhaps created by ritual specialists or elites. The high-quality paintings at Juxtlahuaca Cave include a jaguar and a feathered serpent (Grove 2006:281; Stone 1995:48), both of which are associated with caves in Mesoamerica. The feathered serpent may be one of the earliest depictions of this deity, and it is firm evidence for the cultural connection between caves and water deities in Preclassic Mesoamerica. In the Oxtotitlan Cave, Olmec artists also created feathered serpent and jaguar paintings (Stone 1995:49). Additionally, a remarkable polychrome painting can be seen above the cave entrance. This painting shows an Olmec noble or ritual specialist seated on a zoomorphic altar (Stone 1995:48), which may be the head of a jaguar or a serpent (Grove 2006:281–82, front cover). The open maw of this creature may signify the entrance to the cave, and the seated human figure may be performing a ritual. It is interesting to note that the seated figure is decorated with handprints with crescent shapes denoting portals on the palms. These handprints

appear to be original designs in the mural rather than marks made from later visitors touching it.

The importance of caves in Olmec ritual and cosmology is apparent in numerous carved stone monuments. For instance, monuments at La Venta depict men emerging from caves and holding infants (fig. 3.14), and monuments at Chalcatzingo represent the entrances to caves (Reilly 1999; Tate 2008). The caves on Olmec stone monuments represent portals to ritual mountains and places of creation. Formative period stone monuments, in addition to later Mesoamerican iconography, depict cave entrances as gaping serpent or otherwise zoomorphic mouths and as quatrefoil designs enclosing people and deities (Grove 2006). In fact, a cave at Apoala was named the "Serpent's Mouth" by the Postclassic Mixtec (Williams 2009:81). The Colossal Natural Bridge cave in Oaxaca, described in the previous chapter, contains a painted serpent mouth hieroglyph on its walls that may refer to the cave itself (see fig. 2.18). Elite art shows that caves were symbols of elite power, yet archaeological evidence indicates that non-elites in Mesoamerica also carried out rites in caves related to ancestor worship, rain and agriculture, and offerings for gods (Brady and Prufer 2005).

Blade Cave in Oaxaca contains archaeological evidence for indigenous rain rituals, burial rites, and ceremonies focused on community cohesion from Preclassic to Postclassic times (Fitzsimmons 2005). This cave is located on a hill far from human habitation and thus was only visited by people for ritual purposes. Water drips from formations in the cave, and pools form even during the dry season. For the collection of sacred water, visitors placed pots under drip lines (Fitzsimmons 2005:98). Widespread beliefs in Oaxaca hold that caves harbor rain and earth deities, including the master of the earth, animals, fertility, and human souls (Fitzsimmons 2005:109–11). People carry out rituals for rain in caves and place offerings before stalagmites where the earth lords receive them. Indigenous communities identify with the deities associated with the caves, and rituals here are undertaken for the good of the community (Fitzsimmons 2005:112). Archaeological deposits in the cave include pottery vessels, chert cutting tools, bones of small animals, and human bones, some from children who were sacrificed in rain rituals. In one deposit, a ceramic disk depicting a human eye was part of a mosaic of exotic turquoise (Fitzsimmons 2005:97–98). Artifacts with faces and eyes along with zoomorphic ceramic pots were also recovered throughout the cave. The eye and face symbols probably referred to gods seeing the rituals and communicating with worshipers. Animal bones and images perhaps

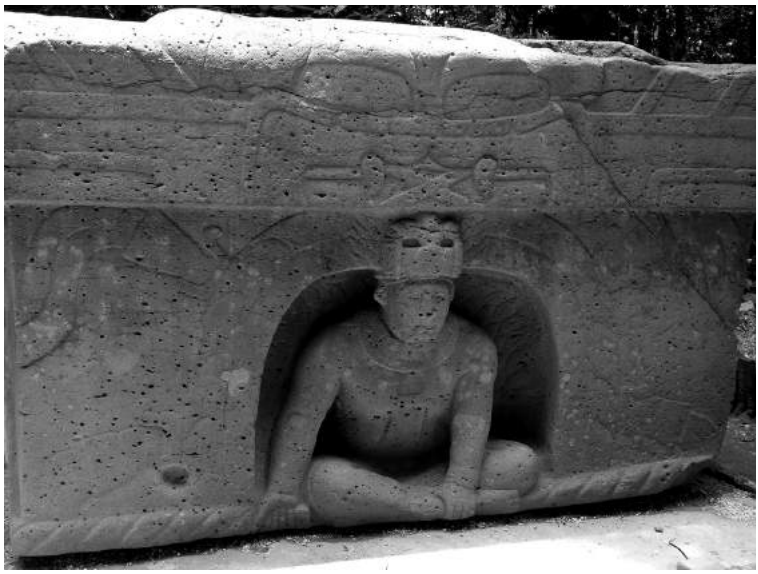

Figure 3.14. Carved monolith showing an Olmec ruler in a ritual cave, La Venta, Tabasco, Mexico.

represented animal souls controlled by the earth lord. Another central ceremonial feature in the cave is a collection of whole ceramic vessels for offerings, jade beads, and shells that were placed around a stalagmite with a carved face. The exotic trade goods in the cave indicate ties to different regions and that elites organized some of the rituals.

Caves in Maya Beliefs

Cave symbolism figures prominently in Maya iconography. Cave entrances appear in Maya art as quatrefoil designs that may have been understood as the open mouths of earth beings (Grove 2006). This design typically encloses individuals, which alludes to ceremonial visits to caves. Maya people also perceived dark temple interiors as symbolic caves with mouths of earth beings representing the entrances (see fig. 2.21). A carved peccary skull from Copán, Honduras, depicts two nobles seated before a decorated stone stela and altar within a quatrefoil cave or temple entrance (Bassie-Sweet 1991:111, fig. 35). The Maya view caves as entrances to the domains of earth deities and the underworld (fig. 3.15), and these caves were also places for rituals

associated with fertility and creation, as in other parts of Mesoamerica. Caves were commonly utilized by the Maya as places to bury their dead, deposit bones of ancestors, and place sacrificial victims (Chládek 2011:30–35; Prufer and Brady 2005). The Naj Tunich Cave in Petén and others in Belize contain masonry tombs for Maya elites (Chládek 2011:31), and the souls of the ancestors are felt to reside in caves. For example, local Yucatec Maya believe that the spirits of ancient Mayas reside in Loltun Cave in Yucatán (Chládek 2011:57). It is also possible that Maya people believed that the placement of human bone in caves was necessary for the renewal of human souls and fertility, much like the animal bones deposited in hunting shrines near boulders (Brown 2005). Additionally, the ancestors in caves communicated with the spirit world on behalf of their communities.

Maya people held caves with springs and rivers, especially those found in mountains, in special reverence. These caves were the sources of water, rain, the fertility of the earth, and the abundance of animals and crops. In humid caves, moisture collects on the walls and formations. Maya religious practitioners visit these caves to collect virgin or ceremonial water (*suhuy ha'*) for rituals by placing ceramic or stone vessels beneath dripping stalactites. Sherds from previously smashed ceramic vessels and small objects, such as jade beads, miniature vessels (*candeleros*), obsidian blades, and snail shells, that were placed in Maya caves (Brady 2005; Prufer 2005:202), sometimes in large numbers, may have been left as votive offerings, payments, or devotional objects. For example, the hundreds of small copper bells excavated from a cave in Honduras (Blackiston 1910) likely were pilgrim offerings for things requested from spiritual forces or used for music in cave rituals.

Many Maya caves exhibit painted and carved designs. Carved designs commonly depict faces or eyes, and they are found not only on cave walls but on cave formations as well (Chládek 2011:47–48; Rissolo 2003:41–42, 65–70). Female genitalia are commonly depicted in Maya caves (Rissolo 2003:64–66), symbolizing fertility, rebirth, and the renewal of water. Other carved images include skulls, geometric images, and footprints (Chládek 2011:47). Maya cave paintings also depict animals and people, whose souls may have been taken by earth lords, according to Maya beliefs (Brown 2005). Animal forms appearing in paintings on cave walls include serpents (Chládek 2011:121; Stone 1995:76–85, 238), monkeys (Stone 1995:59, 77), and deer (Stone 1995:67). Monkeys and felines, possibly jaguars (fig. 3.16), were painted on a stalactite at Actun B'omb'il Pek in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala (Chládek 2011:126; Stone 1995:96). These depictions of animals are related to Maya

Figure 3.15. Actun Tunichil Muknal Cave with a spring at its entrance, Cayo District, Belize. Note stalactite teeth in the cave mouth (photograph by James Meierhoff).

beliefs regarding the existence of animal soul energies within caves, cliffs, and the earth (Brown 2005; Vogt 1969, 1981). The faces in caves may depict earth lords, masters of the animals, and the underworld gods who release animals that are used by humans and represent people's spirit companions or lineages. Other gods, including rain and death deities, are shown as well (Stone 1995:60, 66, 68, 70, 72, 96).

Handprints, both positive images from painted hands touching cave walls and negatives made from pigment blown around a hand, make up the largest class of Maya cave designs (Chládek 2011:52–53, 142; Stone 1995; Strecker 1982; see fig. 2.26). In one instance, archaeologists found children's handprints at a sink hole where they also discovered children's bones, perhaps from their sacrifice for rain ceremonies (Chládek 2011:53). Ritual specialists entering the supernatural realms symbolized by caves produced handprints as a kind of signature at the site of rituals they conducted, and pilgrims touched the cave to acquire some of its spiritual energies. Other handprints are manipulated to show animal figures, such as the heads of dogs.

Ruins

Ancient ruins are important ritual landscapes in Mesoamerica (Heyden 1981; Pohl and Byland 1990:125). Ruins often have mounds of earth and stone resembling hills, some of which contain rooms resembling cave passages. They exhibit ceramic and stone artifacts on their surfaces, and many contain carved stone monuments. Indigenous people collect ancient artifacts for rituals today (Hamman 2002; Sandstrom 1991:235–37), and they communicate with the gods and ancestors shown in the stone monuments (Astor-Aguilera 2010). The ruins of Teotihuacan ("Place of the Gods" in Aztec Nahuatl) were important for Aztec mythology, in particular the Pyramid of the Sun, the hidden cave at its base, and the Avenue of the Dead (fig. 3.17; Heyden 1981). This site presents impressive ritual landscapes. Teotihuacan was one of the largest cities in Mesoamerica, with tall temples framed by mountains. A river ran through the site near the Pyramid of the Sun that housed a cave shrine containing water. The Aztecs believed that gods lived at Teotihuacan, where they created the current world (Hamman 2002:357). Therefore, the ruins of Teotihuacan and the myths and histories associated with it were significant for Aztec social identity.

It is well known that Aztecs made pilgrimages to Teotihuacan to perform rituals at the homes of their gods. The Aztec king Motecuhzoma I oversaw the construction of a ritual platform opposite of the Pyramid of the Sun on the Avenue of the Dead, which were actually named by the Aztecs (Pasztory 1997:15–16; Townsend 2000:46). This platform, the Avenue of the Dead, and the Pyramid of the Sun represented the "oracle of Montecuma" (Headrick 2007:62). Motecuhzoma II travelled to Teotihuacan every twenty days according to the Aztec calendar to perform rituals (Pasztory 1997:15). The

Figure 3.16. Drawings of monkeys and a jaguar (bottom) on the wall of Bombil Pec Cave, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala (drawing by Paulina Makuch after Chládek 2011:126, fig. 3.13).

Aztecs looted the site to recover artifacts, such as stone funerary masks, to take back to Tenochtitlan and ritually cache in the Templo Mayor (Headrick 2007:51–68; Townsend 2000:45). During pilgrimage rituals, they may have left the Aztec sculptures found near the Pyramid of the Sun (Pasztory 1997:15).

The main acropolis on the prominent hill of Monte Alban in Oaxaca was abandoned a few centuries prior to the Spanish conquest, but Monte Alban had great ceremonial significance because of its impressive temples, monumental stone art, and location on a hill overlooking the valley of Oaxaca and its mountains. This site, constructed on a leveled hill, may have originally functioned as a regional pilgrimage center, much like Cholula, Puebla, where people from different social groups interacted through ritual and the exchange of goods (Orr 2001:65). Zapotec and Mixtec people of the Postclassic period visited this ruined city to place offerings and burials in the main plaza (Caso 1982; Joyce 2009), and post-abandonment rituals centered on ancestor worship, tutelary deities, or gods living in the ruined temples and hill on which they rested. Mixtec nobles reused Zapotec tombs, such as Tomb 7 with its rich offerings of gold, crystal, bone, silver, copper, turquoise, shell, and jade artifacts (Caso 1982), representing materials from different parts of Mesoamerica. These rituals at elite tombs in Monte Alban were undertaken

Figure 3.17. Ancient pilgrimage avenue (Way of the Dead), the Pyramid of the Sun framed by ritual mountains, and shrine (foreground) in front of the Temple of the Moon, Teotihuacan, central Mexico.

to link contemporary noble lineages to local tutelary deities and the history of political and economic power at this important site.

For ancient Oaxacan societies, archaeological sites were the abodes of the earth lords, who were the supernatural beings that controlled wild animals (López Austin and López Luján 2009:21). Ruins represented ritual places where natives could petition the earth lord to provide animals for hunting and other necessary resources. Mixtec elites connected themselves to powerful ancient people by carrying out ceremonies in ruins, and Hamman (2008) notes that Mixtec nobles' rituals in ruins were depicted in their codices with images of nobles standing on or near platforms without superstructures. People from several Mixtec communities in highland Oaxaca, for instance, converged at the ruins of Yucunudahui, located on the summit of a mountain, for market exchange and boundary festivals (Williams 2009:14–16). Mixtec people performed *volador* (flyer) ceremonies at this site, in which people descended poles as if they were flying. These ceremonies were dedicated to the bringing of sacred bundles from the sky and the "War from

Heaven" carried out by deified ancestors, who were believed to have originated at this ruin (Hamman 2002:359; Williams 2009:15) and who founded elite Mixtec dynasties. The nobles carried out ceremonies at the site to sustain the gods and maintain world order as well as reinforce community and territorial affiliations. At the same time, the different groups were able to exchange necessities.

Rites in Maya Ruins

Ruins became important locations for Maya rituals and pilgrimages in the Postclassic period. Early explorers throughout the Maya region reported finding whole ceramic vessels, figurines, and other offerings on top of ancient mounds or inside buildings. In most cases the finds were left by Maya pilgrims from Postclassic and historic times. Maya people recognized ruins as being different from natural hills and rocks because of the presence of architecture, stone monuments, and artifacts, and they may have associated the ruins with earlier populations, ancestors, gods, or previous creations. Contemporary K'iche (Quiche) Mayas in the Guatemalan highlands make pilgrimages to ruins to perform rituals (fig. 3.18), and for this purpose, K'iche religious specialists maintain earthen altars with pine boughs and stone crosses on ancient mounds, like at the ruins of Chiche (Wauchope 1951:123–26).

Gann and Gann (1939:19, 35, 48, plates 3 and 5) report many Late Postclassic to historic period ritual artifacts on the upper surfaces of mounds at several Maya ruins in Belize. The objects include anthropomorphic incense burners, coarse pottery, and ceramic figurines depicting deities, perhaps the very ones that the Maya believed resided in the ruins. The large quantity of these objects can be partially explained by the large Maya populations in this region from Late Postclassic to historic times (Demarest et al. 2004; Walker 1990). However, the Late Postclassic Maya carried out more rituals in Maya ruins than their predecessors, perhaps in an attempt to control territory or assert authority over local populations (Walker 1990). The presence of ceremonial deposits and the general lack of domestic debris in ruins indicate that Maya pilgrims arrived at the sites, carried out rituals, and then returned to their homes (Walker 1990). The diversity of ceramic artifacts and types of ritual deposits, including burials, caches, offering vessels, and smashed objects, suggest that Maya visitors from different times and places went to ancient ruins to undertake various kinds of rituals.

Figure 3.18. Sculpted monolith and modern Maya shrine, El Baúl, Guatemala. Note burnt offerings and bundles of flowers.

The ancient Maya ruin of Coba in Quintana Roo in the Yucatán Peninsula has been visited by Maya people for ritual purposes over the centuries (fig. 3.19). The rites may have been a continuation of past Maya pilgrimages to the site. Explorers found ceramic incense burners left by Maya worshippers in the ruins dating from Postclassic times to the present (fig. 3.20), and local Mayas believe that protective spirits reside at the site (Villa Rojas 1995:587–89). For example, the maker and protector of roads, including the great causeway at the site, traveled east to the ruins on this

road and was turned to stone by the rising sun (Villa Rojas 1995:587). A carved stone stela is believed to represent the presence of this deity. Other monuments depicting people were also believed by the Yucatec Maya to be associated with the guardian of the forest, to whom hunters offered candles and incense (fig. 3.21; Gann 1926:118; Villa Rojas 1995:589). They performed these rites so that the guardian of the forest would release game animals to the worshipers. Religious specialists mention Coba and its spiritual guardians in ceremonies because of their great power in healing and providing things people need, including good health and plentiful honey (Villa Rojas 1995:589). Furthermore, many religious specialists travel to Coba to receive their supernatural powers from the resident deities. One in particular spent much time in the ruins to acquire the "lost wisdom of the ancient Maya," since some people believe the original inhabitants of the site still live under it (Villa Rojas 1995:589).

Bodies of Water

Bodies of water, including lakes, rivers, springs, and sink holes, were significant ritual landscapes in ancient Mesoamerica, and people recognized the importance of water for bountiful harvests and the continuation of life on earth (Lucero and Fash 2006; Scarborough 1998). Mesoamerican agricultural societies have been described as "living on the cutting edge of water" (Vargas Pacheco 2001:147), which refers to the marked dry and rainy seasons in the region and the oscillations between flooding, drought, and optimum rainfall. Water on the earth's surface, in particular water flowing from springs, rivers, and lakes, was believed to originate in an underworld paradise called Tlalocan in central Mexico (López Austin 1997). Deities, such as Tlaloc, in this paradise within the earth and mountains provided life-giving water to humans, animals, and plants. Hence, bodies of water associated with caves and mountains were of great importance to Mesoamerican people for they generated the rain needed for crops (Grigsby 1986).

Feathered serpents, many times described or depicted in art as having horns and rattlesnake tails, have long been associated with water and rain (see fig. 1.14). Undulating streams and cave passages with water are seen as serpents. According to Mesoamerican lore, a great serpent resides in bodies of water, and the movement of its body causes currents and the flow of water (Houston 2010:72). Its feathers fan the air, causing wind and storms. These water serpents were associated with female fertility (López Austin 1997:210,

Figure 3.19. Postclassic Maya temple over a ruined substructure, Coba, Quintana Roo, Mexico.

Figure 3.20. Ceramic incense burner with deity image, possibly the honey bee god, from a Postclassic Maya shrine in the ruins of Coba, Quintana Roo, Mexico (after Gann 1926:frontispiece).

Figure 3.21. Carved stone stela where modern Mayas left offerings in the ruins of Coba, Quintana Roo, Mexico.

229), and snakes also symbolized water and its guardians in Maya communities (Sachse 2008:148).

Aztecs carried out ceremonies dedicated to Tlaloc, the god of rain, storms, and water, at the springs, whirlpool, or body of water of Pantitlan (Peñon de los Baños; Carballal Staedtler and Flores Hernández 2006:163–64). This site, located near an early Aztec settlement, was part of a pilgrimage circuit (fig. 3.22; Carballal Staedtler and Flores Hernández 2006:163). A whirlpool

periodically appeared in these ritual waters where Aztec lords offered sacrifices, precious stones, and jewels (Martínez Marín 1972:165). The Aztecs provided these rich offerings to control the flow of rain and water: too much caused flooding and too little meant starvation. Aztecs also sacrificed children to the rain god here. Their crying represented the rain, and they were pure intermediaries with the gods since they had not yet had sex (López Austin 1997:205). A sixteenth-century painting shows Aztec people in canoes offering food and drink in ceramic vessels as well as sacrificial victims at an altar within an enclosure of banners at Pantitlan (Carballal Staedtler and Flores Hernández 2006:159).

Other central Mexican bodies of water that housed agricultural deities were visited during certain festivals of the religious calendar (Martínez Marín 1972:165). The marked rainy versus dry seasons in Mesoamerica caused certain shrines in bodies of water, some of which contain rock art, to disappear and then reappear at ritually important times. One of these shrines, Ayauhcaltitlan, located in Lake Tetzcoco, contained two large statues that remained underwater during the rainy season and appeared when the water level dropped in the dry season. People left incense, broken pottery, and hearts from children around the statue. Another lake shrine visited by pilgrims was located at Santa Cruz in Xochimilco, where an idol rested within the waters of a clear pool.

For centuries in west Mexico, indigenous people carried out pilgrimages to Lake Chapala to give offerings to rain, water, and agricultural deities in the lake (Borhegyi 1964; Starr 1897). Many of these offerings, which date from the Preclassic period to the present, have been recovered from the lake and the shoreline. The objects include small candeleros or possibly incense burners or offering cups from Teotihuacan (Borhegyi 1964:45, fig. 3). Ceramic incense burners with Tlaloc imagery were also deposited in the lake (Borhegyi 1964:40). What is fascinating is that a high percentage of the offerings are miniature incense burners, figurines, and ceramic vessels suspended by cords (fig. 3.23; Borhegyi 1964:43, fig. 1; Starr 1897). Miniature objects are common in pilgrim votive offerings, badges, and amulets around the world since they can be carried for long distances. Contemporary Huichol people still trek to the lake and its islands to leave offerings to spiritual forces, including miniature prayer arrows, beeswax figurines, and decorated gourd bowls. They continue to throw objects in the lake and take water back to their settlements for ceremonial purposes (Borhegyi 1964:40–41). These ceremonies are often undertaken just before the rainy season when planting begins.

Figure 3.22. Depiction of Pantitlan and offerings in a whirlpool or spring in Lake Tetzcoco, central Mexico (drawing from Florentine Codex, I, illustration 33). Note banners and altar.

Springs and rivers were also significant ritual landscapes for the Mixtec people of highland Oaxaca (Pohl and Byland 1990). Rivers and springs were associated with caves, trees, temples, and ceremonial centers in their codices (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2005). Mixtec elites believed in "lineage rivers" belonging to their royal lines that were paths for the gods (Williams 2009:65, 93). Rivers were also symbolically connected to plants and people since they were critical for their nourishment and growth. Mixtec codices show bodies of water within cavelike openings that stand for portals to supernatural realms and residences of gods (Williams 2009:81). In the Codex Bodley, Mixtec elites make an important pilgrimage to a river or spring near a tree where they provide offerings of copal incense and tobacco (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2005:64–65). Also depicted is Lady 10 Vulture, who travels to Fire River to give offerings and receive a message from a serpent in a vision (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2005:65).

Figure 3.23. Miniature ceramic vessel used as a pilgrim offering, Lake Chapala, Jalisco, Mexico (after Borhegyi 1964:45, fig. 2).

Maya Ritual Waters

Pools, springs, and lakes have been the focus of Maya rituals to renew the supply of water from the distant past to the present. Maya people conceptually connected water on the earth's surface with the ocean and the underworld (Taube 2010). Pools shown in ancient Maya art are the abodes of fantastic fish, deities, and other animals (Finamore and Houston 2010), including supernatural jaguars and serpents. The locations of springs, cenotes, rivers, and reservoirs were central to Maya site planning. Maya ceremonies in rivers are evidenced by pottery offering vessels dating from Classic to Postclassic times (Vargas Pacheco 2001:140, 147, 155). Chontal Maya ceramic offerings in the Candelaria River in Tabasco, Mexico, which consisted of water jars that may have contained food and drink, were perhaps left for rain, water, and agricultural deities during droughts around A.D. 950 (Vargas Pacheco 2001:154, 2002). In Yucatán, contemporary altars with offerings, candles, and crosses decorated with women's blouses (huipil) are constructed at the edges of cenotes and caves with springs (Chládek 2011:82).

It is well known that the ancient Maya performed rituals at cenotes (*tz'onot* in Yucatec Mayan) throughout the Yucatán Peninsula (Martos López 2010). Cenotes are more important in Yucatec Maya culture than mountains and rivers, which are largely absent from the peninsula. Cenotes are significant ritual places for they are substantial openings in the earth that contain caves and water, and their dark, deep waters symbolize the primordial waters of creation (Martos López 2010:224). Cenotes are portals into the watery

underworld where people communicate with the supernatural world, and many cenotes contain human skeletons and ceramic vessels, which Mayas threw into the water or placed in underwater crevices. The human bones may be the remains of sacrifices or burials placed in the abodes of earth and water deities. The ceramic vessels may have contained offerings of food and drink for gods in the cenotes.

The most famous Maya ritual pool is the great cenote at Chichen Itza (fig. 3.24). Bishop Landa described a ceremonial structure filled with deity images of "all the gods in the land" built on the edge of the cenote (Tozzer 1966:183) and noted that this cenote was an important pilgrimage destination (Tozzer 1966:109). Its sediments contained large numbers of rich offerings for rain, bountiful harvests, and communication with deities and ancestors, including jade beads, gold artifacts, shell jewelry, wooden images, textiles, ceramic vessels, chert tools, copal incense, and human bones (Coggins and Shane 1984). The ceramic vessels were typically bowls, plates, incense burners, water jars, and chocolate pots (Martos López 2010:224–25). The bones recovered represent whole individuals, perhaps sacrificial victims thrown into the water, and secondary burials of ancestors. The return of ancestors' remains to the cenote may have symbolized their entrance into the primordial waters of creation and their subsequent rebirth (Martos López 2010:225).

Ethnographic descriptions of Yucatec Maya beliefs and ceremonies regarding cenotes reveal fascinating information on Maya identity and religious beliefs (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1964:205). Cenotes are the abodes of the rain gods, the *chaks*, who live wherever there is water, and cenotes are openings to the underworld that contain both good and evil winds that affect people's lives. At the village of Chan Kom (Little Kettle/Cenote), community identity revolves around its core, which contains the main plaza, church, and cenote from which the village gets its name (Re Cruz 1996:12, 52; Redfield and Villa Rojas 1964:88). The cenote marks the center of the village and the location of the most powerful community guardian spirit (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1964:114). Water from local cenotes nourished people, animals, and plants and was used in ceremonies. On one occasion, religious specialists threw thirteen wooden crosses, rum, and chicken innards into the cenote to feed the angry winds residing there so they would not come out to harm people and animals (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1964:176). Importantly, a ritual cenote in a cave deep in the forest, where women never ventured, provided "virgin water" offerings in bowls for the *cha-chak* rain ceremony (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1964:139). This

Figure 3.24. Mouth of the sacred cenote at the ancient Maya site of Chichen Itza, Yucatán, Mexico. Note altar construction on the cenote's rim (left foreground).

ritual cenote was visited by the chaks, or rain gods, who filled their containers to water the maize fields.

Islands

Because they are geographical anomalies—land within water—islands make up special ritual landscapes across the globe (Elzey 1991; Sabloff and Rathje 1975; Turner and Turner 1978:110) although scholars have often left islands out of discussions of ritual landscapes, despite their importance in Mesoamerica (see fig. 3.2). Islands are places where the living world meets the underworld, places of creation, and indigenous people associate islands with life-giving water and rich resources, including fish and shells. They are prominent in Mesoamerican mythology, which further enhances their status as ritual landscapes (Cobos 2010). For instance, investigators in Central America recorded Nicarao-Pipil migration histories that foretold that the people would travel until they encountered their homeland in the form of an island with two round mountains (Stone 1976:166). Islands represent the back of the great crocodile or turtle that floats in the sea to form the earth in Mesoamerican lore, and they still have ceremonial importance in contemporary Mesoamerican societies.

Aztlan, the ancestral island homeland of Aztec patron deities; Isla de Sacrificios off the coast of Veracruz; and Cozumel, a major Maya pilgrimage center already described, are excellent examples of islands of ritual importance. Lake Patzcuaro, Michoacán, exhibits islands as places of creation and rebirth. The Purepecha (Tarascan) goddess Xaratanga, a deity of childbirth, fertility, water, and fish, was worshiped at the island of Jaracuaro (Pollard 1993:134–37), which was associated with human female figurines, water symbolism, and agricultural ceremonies. Today, the island of Janitzio (Where It Rains) is a pilgrimage destination for Day of the Dead ceremonies. The ritual importance of islands in Oaxaca can even be seen in the iconography of Mixtec codices. In one example, Mixtec nobles boat toward an island with a mountain that has multiple caves supporting the sky (fig. 3.25; Nicholson 2005:144, fig. 9.1; Williams 2009:174).

The island best known in Mesoamerica is Aztlan, the origin place of the Aztecs that was located in a paradisiacal lake (Elzey 1991; León-Portilla 2001; see fig. 2.10). The mountain on the island, called Culhuacan, housed seven caves from which the Aztec people originally emerged. Aztlan was a land of plenty where people had an abundance of food and water because of the lake and its surrounding fertile lands. According to Aztec myth-histories, the people left Aztlan at the biding of their patron god, Huitzilopochtli, to wander and make pilgrimages to ritual places before founding their island capital of Tenochtitlan in Lake Texcoco (Tetzcoco), central Mexico. Aztecs recalled their island homeland and pilgrimages by religious specialists to this sacred homeland. Investigators locate Aztlan in west Mexico or perhaps in the southwest United States (Fields and Zamudio-Taylor 2001; León-Portilla 2001). However, the island may have been a mythical place that Aztec elites linked to Tenochtitlan. By creating monumental conch shell sculptures and large caches of shell, coral, and aquatic animals in the Templo Mayor (Matos Moctezuma 1988), the Aztecs symbolically made their island center an important ritual landscape.

Mesoamerican pilgrims frequently traveled to islands. Isla de Sacrificios off the coast of Veracruz was a typical Mesoamerican island pilgrimage shrine. Conquistadores described the island as uninhabited, and it had large temples, especially a tall one in the center, plazas, an enclosing wall, a gateway arch, and stone buildings, many of them in ruins (Nuttall 1910). They were also appalled at images of gods, numerous human bones, vessels with blood, and freshly killed sacrificial victims left by mainland pilgrims in the island's temples. Excavations uncovered unique alabaster vessels, a

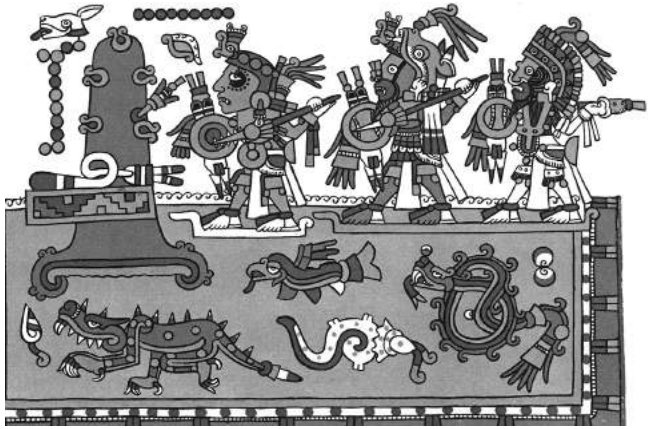

Figure 3.25. Mixtec nobles traveling by canoe to a ritual island with a mountain holding up the sky. Note cave passages on the mountain and the crocodile and plumed serpent in the water (Codex Nuttall, p. 75).

mural depicting the feathered serpent Quetzalcoatl on a round temple, and ceramics from different parts of Mesoamerica, including central Mexico, Puebla, and Veracruz (Nuttall 1910:265, 270, 292; Seler 1998, vol. 6:4). The numerous fine alabaster vessels, probably from Veracruz, date to the Postclassic period, and visitors used them to give offerings to their gods. Other vessels with distinctive styles originated in Central America, especially Costa Rica, where moveable heads appeared on vessel rims (Stone 1976:173).

The beginnings of islands as ritual landscapes are seen in the Preclassic period. Tlapacoya, for instance, was an ancient volcanic rock island once located in a rich lacustrine zone in the now largely dry Lake Chalco in central Mexico. With its grottoes, springs, and dome-shaped pink andesite hill, this island was perhaps a ritual center that attracted large populations for ceremony and interregional trade (Niederberger 2006:174–87). Scholars have suggested that this site was a pilgrimage destination for it largely lacks domestic platforms and its ceremonies were dedicated to rain gods (Barba de Piña Chan 2002). Cliffs at Tlapacoya were decorated with numerous paintings, and excavations uncovered trade goods from across Mesoamerica, including jade, seashells, obsidian, iron ore mirrors, and foreign ceramic vessels, in addition to several hundred ceramic figurines. Many of the figurines depict females and children, perhaps used in fertility rites, and others

may represent religious specialists and people from different civic-religious organizations (Niederberger 2006:181).

Preclassic Olmec centers, including San Lorenzo in Veracruz (Cyphers and Di Castro 2009; Cyphers and Zurita Noguera 2006) and La Venta, Tabasco (Tate 2008), were islands with tall mounds as effigy mountains, ceremonial architecture, and carved monoliths. These islands served as regional political centers and economic hubs that attracted people for trade and ritual. La Venta (fig. 3.26), with its stone monuments with human and maize fertility icons and high conical mound representing a mountain of sustenance surrounded by water, symbolized world creation for the Olmec (Reilly 1999; Tate 2008). Scenes on sculptures at the site showing people emerging from caves holding infants relate to the mythical origins of humans or gods, and these early Olmec sites, especially the island center of La Venta with its high conical mound, may have been the prototypes for later Mesoamerican ritual islands with mountains and caves.

Pilgrims continued to visit La Venta after its political collapse. The monuments, including Monument 13 depicting the "Pilgrim," bear signs of pilgrimage rituals (see fig. 3.10). Stone monuments, including basalt columns, exhibit numerous gouges, depressions, and drilled holes that have been interpreted as evidence of the "killing" of the stones and termination rituals. I suggest that the many gouges, scratched lines, cupules, and pockmarks are "pilgrims' marks," the result of visitors removing spiritual essences (sacred matter) in the form of bits of stone and dust to take with them as divine blessings, a practice evidenced in identical markings on walls and monuments at pilgrimage sites elsewhere (Hedges 2005), including the Olmec sites of El Manatí (Ortiz C. and Rodríguez 1999:246) and San Lorenzo (Cyphers and Di Castro 2009:30). The removal of sacred material from pilgrimage sites is quite common throughout Mesoamerica, especially in the Maya area. For instance, native people removed formations from ritual caves to deposit them and their spiritual power in ceremonial caches within buildings to ensure agricultural and human fertility, health, and good fortune (Brady et al. 1997).

Maya Ceremonial Islands

The concept of island, or *peten*, in Yucatec Mayan intersects with cultural constructs of country, boundary, and territory (Paxton 2009). The Yucatec term *tzol peten* refers to Maya rituals related to the paths of the sun along the

Figure 3.26. Central pyramid on an island in a swamp, La Venta, Tabasco, Mexico.

horizon that converge at the navel of the world (Paxton 2009:78–81). The rituals include the cyclical ordering of community space by visitors in a ceremonial circuit, such as Maya pilgrims and curers "arriving at" (hul), "going to" (*bin*), "coming to" (tal), and "seeing" (ilaj) cenotes (and possibly caves), stone mounds, towns, fields, or lands (Hanks 1988:351–58). As we have seen, these same terms appear in ancient Maya texts regarding pilgrimage (see fig. 2.24). Rituals related to tzol peten and the passage of the sun and symbolic center are in turn linked to the gods' creation of the world (Hanks 1988:354). Maya territories are like islands since they are bounded by a circular perimeter visible on the horizon, the center of which is associated with world creation. Islands in Maya beliefs are perceived as the navels of the world and associated with creation, renewal, fertility, female gods, and ancestors. These beliefs explain the same symbolism found at Cozumel, where Maya people made pilgrimages in the direction of the rising sun (Paxton 2001:123–24).

In the Postclassic period, islands were important Maya ritual centers. Some Maya ceremonial islands were found off the coast of Yucatán, such as Isla Cerritos, Uaymil, Jaina, Cozumel, and the island at Xelha (see figs. 1.7 and 1.8). The large island of Cozumel was perhaps the most important Maya pilgrimage destination since large numbers of Mayas flocked to its sanctuaries from all parts of their realm. Many shrines, which are small square

buildings with a bench where images were placed (Sabloff and Rathje 1975), were found along the beach and in the interior of the island (Rathje and Sabloff 1975:11). Causeways used by Maya pilgrims connected the shrines (Freidel and Leventhal 1975:68; Gregory 1975). North of Cozumel is an island with shrines called Isla Mujeres or "Island of Women" (Holmes 1895:56–63). On the island the Maya constructed one main temple on a cliff rising out of the sea (Holmes 1895:58–59), but this island also contained small masonry sanctuaries for images of Maya gods that were visited by pilgrims (fig. 3.27). Temples on Isla Mujeres were pilgrimage sites for Maya women who desired successful pregnancies and healthy children. Explorers found temples with many ceramic images of women, testifying to the importance of these shrines for human fertility and safe childbirth (Holmes 1895:62). Some of the small temples may have functioned as symbolic sweatbaths for the rejuvenation and metaphorical birth of people and gods (Houston 1996). Jaina Island, located off the coast of Campeche in the Yucatán Peninsula, was a ritual center, port of trade, and pilgrimage site (Piña Chan 1968). The Maya linked Jaina to the setting sun in the west (Houston 2010:73–74; Miller 1982; Paxton 2001:97), which represented the underworld and death. A disproportionate number of burials, estimated in the thousands, have been found on Jaina, indicating that the site was an island necropolis (Piña Chan 1968:97). The burials contained decorated pottery from mainland sites along with unique ceramic figurines, perhaps made at Jaina or nearby on the mainland. The anthropomorphic figurines may have been votive offerings, portraits of gods, representations of people, or Mayas reborn after death. Besides the large number of burials, the ceremonial nature of the architecture, limited amount of arable land, and few domestic structures at the artificial island of Jaina suggest that mainland Mayas traveled to the site for ritual purposes (Piña Chan 1968:30–40). This reconstruction is supported by hieroglyphs at the site, which mention mainland Maya elites (Houston 2010:74).

The next three chapters cover specific ritual landscapes in the Southern Maya Region, including shrines at caves, ruins, boulders, bodies of water, islands, mountains, and cliffs, which are special geographical features that have attracted ceremonial attention. These outstanding landscape features and movement to and within them impacted bodies and senses, thus providing heightened ritual experiences that helped pilgrims achieve their religious goals, which entailed contacting spiritual forces in the "communicating places" of landscape shrines, providing offerings for things needed, and

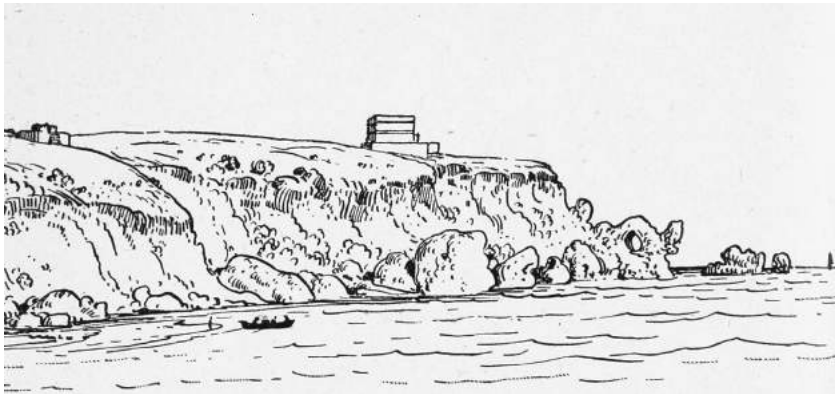

Figure 3.27. Temple shrine on a cliff, Isla Mujeres, near Yucatán, Mexico (after Holmes 1895:58, fig. 13).

maintaining world order. As demonstrated in the ethnographic, historical, and archaeological cases described previously and as I will argue in subsequent sections, ritual landscapes have been important in Mesoamerica and the Maya area over a long period. They have been incorporated into Maya histories, and they symbolize people's origins, community identity, and territory. Like those in other parts of the world, Maya ritual landscapes are the abodes of spiritual essences, forces related to nature and the cosmos, and the ancestors. Indigenous people make pilgrimages to these significant places to provide offerings to resident deities and maintain cosmic balance for the benefit of society, request things they need, and reaffirm their identities and territory. Many times pilgrimage to ritual landscapes peaks during times of stress. People's ties with spiritual forces in landscape shrines and their communities are manifested in the material remains of ritual found there, which can be examined through archaeology. We now explore these central themes using examples from the Southern Maya Region.

CHAPTER FOUR

Homes of the Earth Lords

Maya Caves, Ruins, and Boulders

> Now, when someone is gravely ill we go to Chulum Chico, the cave that is found there, but to go there we should have permission from the municipal president, it is prohibited to go there since it is very dangerous.
>
> Ch'ol Maya narrative, José L. Pérez Chacón,
> *Los Choles de Tila y su mundo*, 1993, 289

Caves, as the epigraph indicates, are among the most significant ritual landscapes in Maya culture. Caves are dramatic landscapes that greatly contrast with other geographical features: large black holes in the ground that contain extensive passages and expansive chambers with unusual rock formations (see fig. 3.15). In addition, they are sources of water, colonies of bats, and cool air. Ethnographic and archaeological research on Maya ritual caves has explored their ceremonial functions for over one hundred years. Nonetheless, we still have much to learn about the use of caves by Maya people. Boulders and ancient Maya ruins also stand out in the natural world, and these particular landscape features can be associated with caves in certain instances. For example, caves are often found near Maya temples (see fig. 2.21). Boulders—viewed as places of interaction with the gods and ancestors who may be petrified within them—are frequently seen at cave entrances, and they often share similar rock art. Additionally, Maya people symbolically connect crevices under boulders and interior rooms in Maya ruins with ritual caves. That Maya worshipers perceive caves, ruins, and boulders as homes of the earth lords is clear from the ethnographic literature. However, these places can be viewed differently by individual Maya

ritual specialists, and due to the pantheistic nature of Maya religion, earth lords can be contacted at a number of different landscape features, including springs, mountains, boulders, and caves, which are all viewed as portals to the underworld. Hence, my grouping of ritual landscapes in this chapter is arbitrary since Maya people combine different natural features with regard to function, use, and meaning. For comparative purposes, then, this chapter considers caves, boulders, and ruins in the Southern Maya Region (see fig. 1.9) based on information from ethnography, history, and archaeology. We will also examine these ritual landscapes in the context of pilgrimage, worldview, community identity, and social boundaries.

THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF MAYA RITUAL CAVES

Over a long period, ethnographers have discussed the importance of caves to pilgrimage ritual in the Southern Maya Region. Interest in contemporary Maya ritual utilization of caves has increased over time due to studies of the material evidence of ceremonies in them (Seler 2003). In one informative example, La Farge (1947:127–28) mentions that a cave called Yalan Na', located in a prominent cliff near the Q'anhob'al Maya community of Santa Eulalia in the Cuchumatan mountains of Guatemala, was the home of ancestral deities called the "Old Father" and the "Old Mother." Maya pilgrims conducted rituals in this cave for these deities, in addition to making divinations and curses. This cave also has a pool, which was seen as the mythical home of a powerful rain serpent (La Farge 1947:122, 129). Similar beliefs in ritual caves as homes of ancestors and forces of nature have been reported for the Q'eqchi' Maya (Adams and Brady 1994) and the Yucatec Maya (Evia Cervantes 2007). The connection between caves and communication with ancestral deities, in addition to their being associated with serpents, rain, and things people need, will be important for our interpretation of the archaeological evidence presented in this volume.

The Tzotzil Maya of Zinacantan believe caves to be central places for male religious specialists to carry out ceremonies in order to contact divine forces. Caves are included in ritual landscapes called *ch'en* in Tzotzil Mayan, or "hole in the ground" (portal), that also include sink holes, springs, ravines, and lakes (Vogt 1981:126–29). Additionally, these openings are the dwellings of earth lords and the Earth Owner (Yahval Balamil, related to the Yahaw of other Maya groups), who is seen as a fat, rich Ladino who has much money

and livestock (Vogt 1981:126). This Earth Owner has serpent attributes and is associated with thunderbolts. He owns the water holes and the products of the earth, such as corn and game animals, and he controls the lightning and the clouds that bring rain for crops. Tzotzil myths describe how men once went into caves to acquire wealth and resources. However, visits to caves can also be dangerous as people can be captured by earth lords and forced to work underground for a long time. Importantly, Tzotzil Maya religious specialists contrast ritual caves and their earth lord denizens with distinct mountains and their ancestral gods.

In other case studies, Tzeltal Mayas from Cancuc, Chiapas, state that the soul essences of wind and lightning, also associated with rain, live in caves in mountains throughout their territory (Pitarch Ramón 1996:60–62). Some of these essences include the owners or lords of the mountains. In the Ocosingo Valley in Chiapas, Tzeltal Mayas constructed altars in ritual caves found near ancient ruins and modified hills (fig. 4.1). At these caves they gave offerings to Hun Ahau, the "God of the Mountain" (also Yahaw, "[Earth] Lord"; Blom and La Farge 1926:252, 367–68). The offerings in one cave, placed around a stone protuberance, consisted of candles, incense, and pine boughs. Tzeltal Mayas at Oxcuc placed crosses at caves where lightning originates to indicate ties between their settlements, social groups, and these important ritual landscapes (Vogt and Stuart 2005:170). The names of Tzeltal Maya hamlets are actually derived from those of local ritual caves. At the Tzeltal community of Amatenango, people believe that their ancestors live in a cave on a mountain (Vogt and Stuart 2005:172). Previously, Tzeltal Mayas placed the bones and ashes of important lineage members in urns in this "cave of the ancestors," which belonged to their settlement or lineage (Vogt and Stuart 2005:171). On the summit of this mountain rests a large rock shrine near the cave entrance. Ancestors looked from the cave and told the Tzeltal Maya to settle in the valley below. Inside the cave, the ancestors have a beautiful lake and fields, thus, Tzeltal Mayas ask them for rain and good crops during rituals at this place.

Ch'ol Maya caves in Chiapas contain human souls and the essences of ancestors: both good and bad supernatural forces residing in caves can grab Ch'ol Mayas' souls or spirit essences (*ch'ujlel*); when a person falls into a river or cave, his or her spirit becomes trapped in the earth, a cave, or a mountain (Pérez Chacón 1993:280, 285, 289); a curer must ritually petition cave energies for the release of the souls of sick people, like at the cave of Tila where lost souls are kept (Pérez Chacón 1993:289; Vogt and Stuart 2005:175–76). Ch'ol

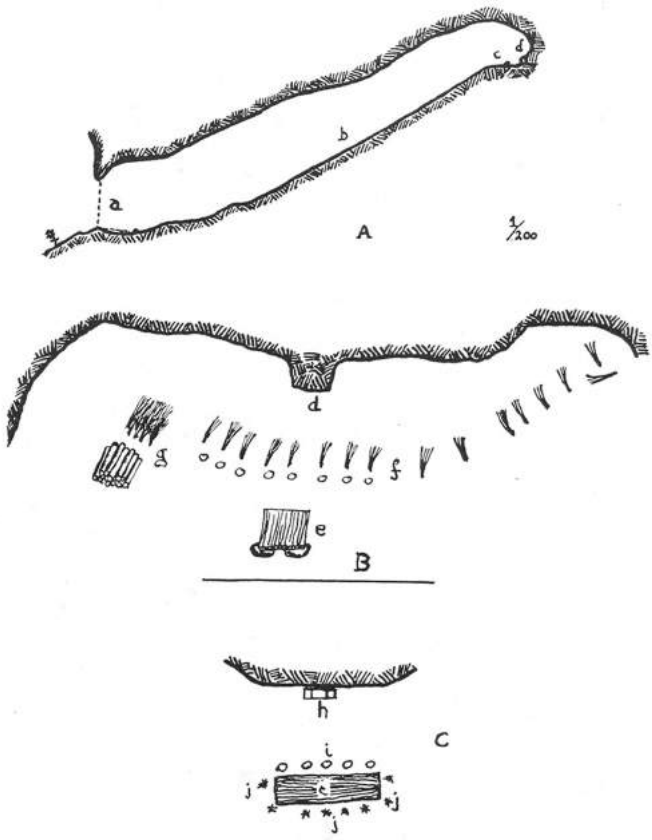

FIG. 310—Chacalchib, Chis. Altars.

A. Section of cave.
a. Sleeping place.
b. Ascent.
c. Level place.
d. Projection of rock.
B. Plan of Altar.
e. Board for incense.
f. Pine tips and candle sticks.
g. Reserve pile of pine tips and candle sticks.
C. Plan of Second Altar.
h. Cross.
i. Candle sticks.
j. Pine tips set on end.

Figure 4.1. Profile drawing of a Tzeltal Maya ritual cave (top) and plan view of an altar at a rock protuberance in the back of the cave, Chacalchib, Chiapas, Mexico (after Blom and La Farge 1926:fig. 310).

Mayas from Tila believe that a large crack in the bedrock to the northeast of the Tzeltal Maya village of Cancuc is the home of soul essences from other communities (Pitarch Ramón 1996:43), and they also believe that underground passages connect all the ritual caves visited during pilgrimages. For instance, one cave called Yochib found near Cancuc has another entrance near Tacotalpa, Tabasco, in the north (Pérez Chacón 1993:314–15). Therefore, different Maya communities can contact the same spiritual forces at different

caves. Ch'ol Mayas also believe that their ancestors originated in caves (Vogt and Stuart 2005:175). In addition, their ritual caves house the owner of the mountains, who keeps watch over all animals. They believe that this entity, called don Juan, inhabits ritual caves from which he controls winds, rains, and wild animals. According to Ch'ol myths, people from Tabasco hid stolen animals of all types in these caves. There also existed a cave that had large rocks in the form of jaguars and a lake inside (Vogt and Stuart 2005:175–76). Maize was first found in mythological caves where lightning struck a rock inside and exposed maize kernels. A cave near Tila, called Chulum Chico (Small Sacred Earth [?]) houses dangerous forces, and Ch'ol religious specialists only visit it when someone is gravely ill. Ceremonies at this cave restore health by retrieving the victim's entrapped soul (Pérez Chacón 1993:289).

In the Lacandon area, people fear caves for they are potentially dangerous places (fig. 4.2). Therefore, Lacandon people only venture to caves on certain ritual occasions (Soustelle 1970:31; see fig. 3.13). Some caves are the realm of Kisin, a deity associated with the underworld who can bring earthquakes and diseases, and the presence of people at the home of Kisin can result in their deaths (Soustelle 1970:31–32). Also, earth lords, including the rain and earth deity Mensabak, who reside in caves, rock-shelters, and cliffs (these landscapes are called *aaktun*, or "[hollow] rock/cave in a cliff," in Lacandon

Figure 4.2. Ritual cave (Cueva de los Murcielagos near the Sak Tat shrine) associated with ancestors and Lacandon Maya myths, Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico.

Mayan), can eat people (Boremanse 1998b:201–2). In one instance, the Lacandon Maya abandoned a ritual cave filled with their incense burners because the resident deities killed family members by sending diseases (Villa Rojas 1995:312). Other Lacandon ceremonial caves are associated with the sun god (K'in), a benevolent god who travels through subterranean passages at night, which links the movements of heavenly bodies with ritual landscapes. In his travels through caves, the sun god defeats the underworld lords, Kisin in particular, and then rises again in the sky (Soustelle 1970:32–33). The sun god needs to be sustained during his travels in the underworld and propitiated to produce good harvests through offerings of incense, corn gruel, and prayer at caves (Duby 1955). Lacandon dead buried in these caves were thought to join the sun in its journey through the dark passages, and one Lacandon family settled near a cave at the base of a tall cliff near San Quentin, Chiapas, since they viewed it as the home of their sun god. They maintained a shrine in the cave even though the soil in the area was poor (Duby 1955:33).

Few ethnographic studies have been conducted on Itzaj Maya ritual caves in Petén, but the small amount of information available demonstrates their cultural significance. Caves were connected with ritual mountains: In Itzaj Mayan *aktun* refers to mountain caves and the term *ch'e'em* to cave openings. One ethnographic source lists the name of a special mountain near Lake Peten Itza as Cahuí (Kah Witz [?] or "Village or Second Mountain" [?]; Schumann 1971:126). Another cave near Lake Peten Itza in central Petén is called Jovitzinaj or Jolwitzinaj (Cave [Head/Entrance] of the House in the Mountain) in Itzaj Mayan (Tesucún Chan and Tesucún 1999:35), which is related to concepts of caves and mountains as homes for deities and ancestors. Aktun Kan, or "Cave of the Serpent," is another Itzaj ritual cave and is found at the foot of a central ritual mountain near Lake Peten Itza (Tesucún Chan and Tesucún 1999:44). Its name reflects an Itzaj Maya belief that serpents dwell in caves, a belief that is shared with other Maya peoples. The Itzaj Maya believe that animal souls can be trapped in corrals in caves if a person weaves a net of thread in a cave's entrance (Schumann 1971:12–13). This belief parallels Maya concepts of caves as dwellings of the earth lord who controls animal souls. In recounting a myth about the "lord of the deer" (Hofling 1991:136–53), Itzaj informants describe a cave (aktun) located at the base of a mountain (witz). In this cave an old man (*nohoch winik*, "great/ancient/large man/person") keeps a large herd of deer for the Itzaj to hunt. This cave is viewed as the door to a large space that is the ranch home of the lord of the deer, and the cave appears and disappears like a magical door opening and

closing. If the Itzaj wish to hunt deer, the lord of the deer calls them to the cave. In the Itzaj Maya myth of "Wild Beasts," great animals live inside caves in two mountains called Hobon Pich (Hollow Pich Tree) and Ah Wo' (The Place of the Wo' Frog), which are located on a lake (Hofling 1991:185–92). In this myth, the caves also appear as doors to the houses of animals. A great man, a sorcerer (*ah waay*) who lives in the cave, knows how to heal, and he ties up animals inside so they cannot leave. At the cave entrance, this same man places water in a clay vessel that transforms into a lake, symbolically connecting caves to rain and groundwater.

Contemporary Maya Pilgrimages to Caves

Indigenous people in the Southern Maya Region still go on pilgrimages to ritual caves, which are important for understanding past Maya religious practices. Cave shrines near the Ch'ol Maya community of Tila are important pilgrimage destinations for many Mayas (Josserand and Hopkins 2007). After arriving at these shrines, Mayas reinforce covenants with Catholic and native spiritual forces by undertaking rituals, maintaining positive attitudes, and providing offerings and prayer, which please the gods. At Tila and other sites, such as Esquipulas in Guatemala, Maya pilgrims leave votive offerings of metal icons near images of the Black Christ, and they consume small votive clay tablets to maintain their health, become pregnant, and ensure safe childbirth (see fig. 2.4; Borhegyi 1954:393–94; Hunter and de Kleine 1984; Josserand and Hopkins 2007:106–7). They also visit local cave shrines associated with water and mountains to leave offerings of candles and flowers for the spiritual essences found there (Bond 2010:161; Josserand and Hopkins 2007:106). An important ritual cave at Tila is visited by Maya religious specialists who perform rituals for crop fertility and healing the sick (Bassie-Sweet et al. 2011; Vogt and Stuart 2005:173–74). This cave houses an image, a stalagmite with a Black Christ figure, that is the patron saint of the community, and Ch'ol Mayas believe holy water drips from the image. During the fiesta of Santa Cruz, Ch'ol pilgrims descend from a mountaintop shrine to this "sacred cave of the Señor de Tila," where the Black Christ was hidden (Pérez Chacón 1993:214, 315). At this cave, Maya pilgrims finalize their obligations and offerings to their Christ figure and patron saint, who provides them with sacred water and rain.

Ch'ol Mayas from Chiapas, in addition to Mayas from Tabasco, make pilgrimages to Tila to make offerings to a Black Christ figure housed in the

church, for whom they also play music and carry banners (Pérez Chacón 1993:207–20). The pilgrimage is viewed by Mayas as a way of keeping their past promises to the Black Christ, in addition to their offerings of candles, *milagro* votive offerings, and money. The pilgrims pay the Black Christ for things given to them and make new requests, or "promises," that can be seen as covenants between people and the Black Christ. Ceremonial rounds made by Maya ritual specialists to hills, crosses, and caves around Tila, where they make offerings, are also seen as being important for communicating with spiritual forces and fulfilling promises to them (Pérez Chacón 1993:222–24). Additionally, the pilgrimages serve to initiate Ch'ol Maya curers. One Ch'ol man visited towns in eastern Chiapas in a regional ritual circuit that terminated at the church of the Black Christ of Tila to fulfill his promises to the gods ("hacer mis promesas") in order to become a curer (Pérez Chacón 1993:288). Pilgrimages to Tila bring large amounts of money to local Ch'ol Mayas and merchants since the multitudes of visitors buy large amounts of food and offerings (Pérez Chacón 1993:217, 222).

Despite the importance of churches and Christian beliefs in Maya ritual, Josserand and Hopkins (2007) argue that pilgrimages to Tila, and elsewhere in Mesoamerica, originated in precolonial times when indigenous people visited cave and mountain shrines seen as the homes of the earth and rain gods. Caves with artifacts and paintings, like the Joloniel (Jolja) Cave near the Ch'ol Maya town of Tumbala, Chiapas, demonstrate the importance of Maya pilgrimage before the introduction of Catholicism. At these ancient ritual caves, Mayas gave offerings to the earth and rain gods in order to receive rain, good harvests, and good health. Today, indigenous pilgrimages have merged with Catholic festivals at churches, such as Corpus Christi and Holy Week (Semana Santa), thus preserving Maya beliefs and ritual in a Christian guise (Josserand and Hopkins 2007). Ch'ol Mayas in the region of Joloniel make pilgrimages to local caves on May 3 to undertake Day of the Cross ceremonies to bring rain (Bassie-Sweet et al. 2011). These Maya perform rituals so that after the dry season, water flows each year from rivers associated with—and thought to originate in—caves.

A Tzotzil pilgrimage circuit near Zinacantan includes a cave in the side of a limestone sink hole called Bankilal K'ut Ch'en (Senior Stomach Cave), where the earth lord's stomach is found (Vogt 1993:111). Tzotzil male religious specialists and pilgrims place candles in holes in the cliff on the edge of the sink hole as offerings. The participants in the ritual become tense during the ceremony since the shrine is associated with the capricious earth lord. Other

caves expel water, and they are the focus of water and lineage rituals for social groups living nearby (Vogt 1981:129, 1993:99). The Tzotzil Maya also communicate with earth deities at shrines placed at cave entrances (Sheseña Hernández 2009). Another cave that has been used for a long period by Tzotzil Maya religious specialists is Avan Ch'en (Shouting Cave), from which they believe the earth lord, or "Earth Owner," shouted in the distant past (Vogt 1981:128). This cave has many entry points, each with cross shrines that Maya pilgrims from specific hamlets, or lineages, in the vicinity of the cave visit to celebrate their water hole and lineage festivals. According to the Tzotzil Maya, a silver cross, which they believe once manufactured money, was discovered in Avan Ch'en, and they placed this cross in their church at the center of town where they could all benefit from its presence (Vogt 1981:128–29).

Members of the Mensabak Archaeological Project visited a recently abandoned Lacandon Maya cave shrine on a hill near the Lacandon community of Mensabak (Palka and Sánchez Balderas 2012; fig. 4.3). Lacandon informants

Figure 4.3. Historic Lacandon Maya cave shrine containing ceramic incense burners, an incense nodule board, paper strips, Late Postclassic Maya pottery, and turtle shells, Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico.

stated that relatives visited the cave and performed rituals there in the mid-twentieth century for curing the sick and for requesting rain and good harvests from resident spiritual forces. This cave shrine, which Lacandon residents call Aj Chah Chi ([That/The Place of] the Colander) consists of a shallow cave that has been artificially deepened. The cave entrance is full of Lacandon ritual implements, including incense burners (*u lakil k'uh*), paper (*hach huun*), turtle carapaces (*aak*), balls of incense (*poom*), and wood in the shape of cutting boards (*shikal* or *xikal*) to hold incense nodules. Several Lacandon incense burners are located at the back of the cave, and they face toward the back cave wall and the center of the hill where deities reside. A large crack in this cave contains human burials. A Late Postclassic to historic period plate and ceramic colander resting at the entrance of the ritual cave, which are material traces of gods and ancestors, were removed from the burials.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF MAYA RITUAL CAVES

Archaeological and ethnohistoric research has established that caves were significant ritual landscapes for pilgrimage in the Southern Maya Region. At the time of the conquest of lowland Chiapas in 1695, the Ch'olti'-Lacandon Maya of Sac Bahlam, and perhaps other Maya peoples in the region, worshiped in a cave near the Lacantun River (Río del Lacandon), where Spanish officials came across several religious images ("varias figuras de lacandones"; BAGG 1940:185). The images may have represented earth, rain, or community deities like others mentioned by the Spanish for lowland Maya communities. The Ch'olti'-Lacandon Maya, for instance, produced fine incense burners for the community temple at Sac Bahlam, in addition to ceramic figurines of crocodiles, serpents, and other creatures (Houwald 1979:315). The images at Sac Bahlam were likely deity portraits like examples dating to Late Postclassic and historic times found by explorers in caves in the region (fig. 4.4; Cook 2004; Cordan 1963:88–113; Palacios 1928:89). Historic ritual caves and images most likely were used for agricultural and healing rituals by local Maya communities associated with the caves and the territory these caves and artifacts were found in.

Maya people have extensively utilized ritual caves in the region since the Preclassic period (Brady 1989, 2000; Stone 1995), when populations rose and the practice of agriculture led to the increased importance of territorial boundaries. Researchers have discovered specific material remains and

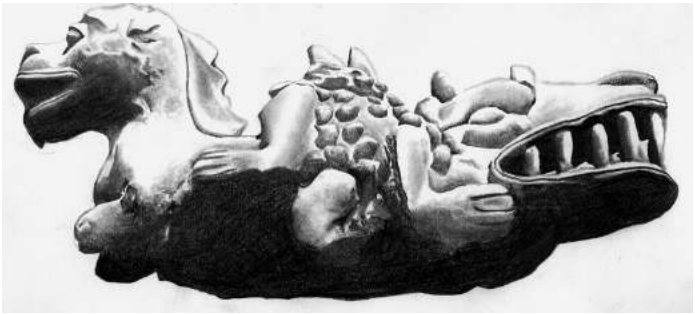

Figure 4.4. Late Postclassic–historic Maya zoomorphic ceramic figurine and anthropomorphic incense burner from Maya ritual caves near the Jatate River, Selva Lacandona, Chiapas, Mexico (drawings by Paulina Makuch after Cordan 1963:plates facing p. 88; not to scale).

features in caves that testify to their ritual functions, like human burials, offering deposits, ritual pottery and artifacts, and ceremonial architecture, including altars (Prufer and Brady 2005). Additionally, they have found walkways made from stones and cave formations that conducted Maya worshipers to chambers, springs, or altars inside the ritual caves (Chládek 2011:112–13; Rissolo 2003:56–61, 138). Stone-block walls demarcated ritual spaces, controlled movement, and marked areas for human burials (Chládek 2011:31–36; Rissolo 2003:84). Through time, Maya people performed rituals on altars made of stones, cave formations, or small constructions covered with stucco (Chládek 2011:109–13; Rissolo 2003:40, 82). Artifacts generally found in Maya caves include numerous ceramic sherds and whole vessels

used for food offerings or to collect sacred water, chert and obsidian tools for sacrifices, manos and metates used for agricultural rituals, and stones with worked basins (*haltun*) for collecting cave water for rain and agricultural ceremonies (Chládek 2011; Rissolo 2003). Other artifacts related to pilgrimage include large numbers of stones, shells, miniature artifacts, burials, and musical instruments. For example, the ceremonial Quimistan Cave near Naco, Honduras, which may date to the Postclassic period, contained over eight hundred plain and effigy copper bells and a mask with turquoise inlays from central Mexico (Blackiston 1910; Stone 1976:191). These artifacts and other finds point to the importance of exotic trade goods for ceremonial deposits in caves. The copper bells were important votive offerings in rituals in the cave because of their substance, color, and use for ceremonial music, and music from the bells and the blue stone mask, which may represent rain, could have been used by Maya pilgrims in water rituals.

Cave symbolism is prominent in Classic Maya art and writing in the study area. The Maya used cave hieroglyphs to denote places and polities, suggesting the importance of these places. Cave hieroglyphs symbolize portals or entryways and may appear as darkened skeletal maws, profiles of a dark cave entrance, or round signs with cross-hatching to denote darkness; some also include eyeballs (Stone 1995:170). The hieroglyphs, glossed as *ch'e'en* (or *chuen*), were utilized on Maya monuments as place-names or to show where people originated (Brady and Colas 2005). Hieroglyphic and archaeological evidence indicates that ancient Maya warriors attacked and took control of ceremonial caves, which signaled the defeat of their enemies (Brady and Colas 2005:156). The connection between people and the caves where local deities and ancestors resided explains why Maya people protected these sites. If a community's ritual cave was sacked, community members could no longer communicate with spiritual forces to maintain cosmic balance. On the Tablet of the Cross at Palenque, the noble on the left stands on the symbol for a ceremonial cave to which pilgrimages took place (Bassie-Sweet et al. 2011; Stuart and Stuart 2008:197). The placement of his feet on the cave symbol implies that he made a pilgrimage to it. The cave symbol also carries two stylized feet that resemble a foot ascending temple steps in the *tab'ay* or "dedicate" hieroglyph (see fig. 2.24).

Maya caves in the study region frequently contain images of animals and handprints (see fig. 2.26). At Aktun Uayazba Kab, carved monkey and other animal designs decorate a boulder near the main entrance (Helmke and Awe 1998:165). Similarly, the walls of the Bombil Pec Cave in Alta Verapaz,

Guatemala, from the previous chapter contain painted monkey and jaguar designs (Chládek 2011:126; Stone 1995:96; see fig. 3.16). A snake with an open mouth at Cueva San Miguel in Petén represents the cave passage itself, a mythical snake living inside the cave, or snakes in general, which are believed by Mayas to reside in caves (Chládek 2011:121). Snakes are also commonly depicted in cave and cliff rock art (Stone 1995:49, 76–79). All of these animal images may symbolize animal souls held by the earth lords, who release them to hunters or curers restoring human health by recovering animal spirit companions if provided the proper ritual offerings at the caves (Brown 2005). Earth lords and ancestors, who release souls of animals and other things people need, may be symbolized by faces, eyes, and handprints in Maya caves (Stone 1995:66–70). Recently, investigators working near the ancient Maya site of Budsilha, Chiapas, found a cave with several red handprints (fig. 4.5) and a possible red footprint on a wall in an inner chamber (Scherer and Golden 2012). The handprints were made by Maya pilgrims performing rituals in the cave. The designs and ceremonial use of the cave have not been dated at this time, but the designs are similar to Late Postclassic or historic period rock art in Chiapas. The entrance to this cave is found at the base of a hill that has a cenote on its summit (Golden and Scherer 2010:38–39). Ancient Maya structures, which may be shrines, can be seen near the cave and cenote.

Archaeologists have examined the ritual function of several large caves at ancient Maya sites in the Petexbatun region of southwest Petén, Guatemala. They found that temples face cave entrances, and subterranean passages pass under monumental architecture (Brady 1997). The Maya also built platforms and walls near cave mouths. The caves were full of ceremonial artifacts left by Maya pilgrims, including broken pottery, often jars used to collect water dripping in the cave or to transport offerings. The pottery was then ritually smashed to terminate its use and ceremonial power. Maya worshipers may also have carried ceramic sherds into caves to leave as pilgrims' blessings, as in other parts of the world, since single fragments were common. Additionally, whole plates and drinking vessels were placed in wall niches where they presumably held offerings of food and drink for gods and ancestors. Archaeologists documented large quantities of human bone on the floors, indicating that the caves were utilized for burials or sacrifice.

Caves in the chasm at Aguateca have yielded evidence of Maya rain rituals (Ishihara 2009). The chasm is located near a spring where rock art adorns cliff walls. Additionally, cool mist rises up from the chasm like rain clouds. Inside, archaeologists recovered musical instruments—such as ceramic

Figure 4.5. Red handprints in the Cueva de las Manos Rojas near Budsilha, Chiapas, Mexico (photograph courtesy of Andrew Scherer; Scherer and Golden 2012:55, fig. 51).

whistles and drums, bone rasps, and ceramic flutes—that were important in rain ceremonies, as we have seen at other sites. Miniature pottery vessels, linked to rain-making dwarfs, and burials of children discovered in the chasm were viewed as evidence of rain rituals that were performed throughout Mesoamerica. Significantly, however, the musical instruments, miniature artifacts, and burials are also signs of pilgrimage rituals. At Dos Pilas, portable greenstone axheads were found in ceremonial caves (Brady 2010:221), and these axes are linked to the rain god Chak, who used them as lightning bolts. Ethnographic information clarifies the connection between lightning, rain, and stone axes found around the world. The Lacandon Maya at Mensabak have told me that lightning must be a stone ax, or contain an ax blade, because it splits trees and branches like an ax when it strikes. Thus, stone axes and bifaces found on the ground were left from lightning crashing to the earth.

Archaeological research at Lake Mensabak has recovered substantial

information on Maya rituals in caves over a long period (Palka and Sánchez Balderas 2012). The earliest cave rituals took place in Late Preclassic times. During this period, the Maya resided away from the lake at a site called Noh K'uh, but they traveled to shrines on the lake for rituals. One major shrine, Mirador Mountain, which is on an island, contains numerous caves and a large vertical entrance on the summit. The passage of this cave travels under a temple (see figs. 1.2 and 1.6). We recovered a small number of ceramic sherds from this cave, which date to the Late Preclassic and Late Postclassic periods. However, caves utilized by the Late Preclassic Maya on the mountain were largely devoid of artifacts since Maya worshipers kept the caves clean or merely left perishable offerings, like food. Ritual caves dating to Late Postclassic and historic times at Lake Mensabak, however, contain burials and artifacts. This period witnessed a population influx to lakeside settlements dated to A.D. 1250–1650 (based on ceramic types and radiocarbon dates; Palka and Sánchez Balderas 2012). The human burials from this period contain skulls with tabular erect cranial shaping, bones with evidence of trauma caused by sharp metal weapons, and artifacts, mainly ceramic plates. Similar burial patterns are found in the caves surrounding Lake Petha (Cook 2004; Maler 1901; Tozzer 1907) and Lake Miramar (Blom 1954; Rivero Torres 1992). The contemporary Lacandon Maya at Mensabak state that many human burials are found in caves or at the bases of cliffs throughout the region and that the burials are often covered with piles of rocks. The cave burials are frequently accompanied by well-preserved artifacts. Lacandon collaborators describe human burials in one cave shrine as having weaving implements of hard wood, such as batons for making clothing. These ancestors communicated with deities in ritual places, and their burials represented community origins and territory.

Our project made a fascinating discovery at a cliff shrine called the house of the god Mensabak by local Lacandon Maya. We documented three human skeletons with their knees drawn up to their heads, like mummy bundles, in a cave up on the cliff. The burials were placed together, and the bones still had dried skin, muscle, and hair attached. Furthermore, the burial cave contained a well-preserved wooden stool or seat with a curved surface and four supports that was used by Late Postclassic and historic Maya ritual specialists entering the cave to perform ceremonies near the skeletons (fig. 4.6). Lacandon myths concerning a wooden seat at the Mensabak shrine used for resting and communicating with the gods probably refer to this deposit (Boremanse 2006:67). Archaeologists have found other adult burials in a cave

Figure 4.6. Wooden stool in a cave shrine in the Mensabak ritual cliff, Lake Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico. Note the human skeleton behind the stool.

at the habitation site of Los Olores (Palka and Sánchez Balderas 2012), which also date to the Late Postclassic and historic periods. The skeletons were found with crude female anthropomorphic ceramic figurines. One depicts a woman with striped face paint or tattoos, and Spanish officials recorded the use of striped body paint or tattoos among the historic Yucatec-speaking Maya people at Nohha (Chávez Gómez 2000:51; López de Cogolludo 1957:699; see fig. 5.6). It is possible that the Maya at Lake Mensabak placed figurines in many of their burials, just like on Jaina Island. At Mensabak the inclusion of female figurines in the burials may have been related to rituals for the purpose of rebirth in the afterlife or communicating with spiritual forces to continue the fertility of the land and the community.

At another cave at Mensabak, investigators explored a Maya shrine in a passage behind a ritual cliff with painted rock designs (fig. 4.7). This cave, associated with community origins and identity, is found at the archaeological site of Tzibana, which is the largest ceremonial site on the lake. This site has monumental architecture dating to the Late Preclassic period and Late Postclassic habitation platforms. The rock art on this cliff is a main reason why the ritual cave was important over a long period. The cave entrance is also found on the lakeshore, which made it crucial for ceremonies related to water. Archaeologists recovered several fragments of cave formations near Late Postclassic to historic platforms at the site of Tzibana, which may have been taken from the cave as sacred material for ceremonies. The Tzibana cave

Figure 4.7. Ritual cave on the lakeshore near a cliff with rock art and the ruins of Tzibana, Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico.

contained a human cranium, several long bones, and ceramics, including fragments of large Preclassic water jars with rope designs near the vessel opening. Also, a small, crude bowl dating from Late Postclassic to historic times was placed by ritual specialists, maybe Lacandon Maya men or their ancestors, on a natural rock pedestal in the middle of the cave. In recent times, the Lacandon Maya performed healing and ancestor veneration ceremonies in the Tzibana cave and utilized cave formations as altars with offerings bowls and incense burners around them (Boremanse 2007:123, fig. 2; Bruce 1968:139, photo 3). The Tzibana cave contained two complete Lacandon

incense burners and fragments of several others, and large chunks of burnt incense and soot from Lacandon rituals were found at the cave entrance. Lacandon collaborators believe that this cave is the entrance to the house of the god Mensabak, where dead family members pass while traveling to their new home in the Mensabak cliff shrine.

The Archaeology of Maya Pilgrimage to Caves

Caves served as places for Mayas on pilgrimage to carry out rain and agricultural ceremonies, rituals for human health and healing, and communication with ancestors over a long period. Material culture and art in caves in the Southern Maya Region present strong evidence for pilgrimage (Adams and Brady 1994; Brady and Prufer 2005; Stone 1995). Caves are frequently separated from Maya domestic sites, and their distance from settlements and lack of evidence of habitation also demonstrate their pilgrimage function. Public ceremonies were held at the entrances of caves, and private rites were conducted inside, especially deep within the narrow passages. Caves utilized by Maya people exhibit constructions for public rituals at the cave entrances often dating to the Late Preclassic and Classic periods (Rissolo 2003:131). For instance, the impressive mouth of Naj Tunich Cave in Petén exhibits a large platform for ceremonies involving many participants. Likewise, the Actun Toh Cave in Quintana Roo is accessed by a series of built terraces leading up a hill to a vertical cave mouth (Rissolo 2003:37–38). The ancient Maya fabricated floors, walls, and altars along the access route to this cave, essentially transforming the hill into a pyramid to be used for public ceremonies. Causeways connecting sites to ritual caves, such as the 250-meter-long walkway from the ruins of Cahal Uitz Na to the Actun Nah Beh Cave in Belize (Chládek 2011:140), accentuate the importance of public ceremony and pilgrimage at Maya caves. And Maya caves often contain rock art related to pilgrimage ritual. Loltun Cave in Yucatán, for example, was a destination for Preclassic Maya pilgrims (Stone 1995:57–61) and contains a design depicting a Maya male noble walking to the cave or performing a ceremony there (Stone 1995:59). The hieroglyphs over this figure describe the date of his arrival to (the "hand glyph" for huliy) and rituals in the cave (see fig. 2.25).

Maya caves were not used for habitation or storage space. Ritual pottery, burials, stone grinding tools, and ceremonial items dominate their artifact assemblages (Prufer and Brady 2005). The Balankanche Cave in Yucatán, for instance, contains large numbers of incense burners, offering vessels, and

Figure 4.8. Miniature stone manos and metates, a ceramic plate, a small jug, Tlaloc vessels, and incense burners in an ancient Maya shrine, Balankanche Cave, Yucatán, Mexico.

grinding stones (Andrews 1970), and the miniature ceramic vessels and diminutive stone grinders brought by pilgrims did not have a domestic function (fig. 4.8). Balankanche exhibits a large cave formation that resembles the Maya world tree with ritual offerings heaped at its base (fig. 4.9; Andrews 1970:10). At the end of the cave's passages rest pools of clear water along with ceramic jars depicting Tlaloc, the Mesoamerican rain, earth, and storm god (figs. 4.10 and 4.11; Andrews 1970:14). This cave also exhibits positive red handprints (Helmke and Awe 1998:149; Strecker 1982:49) left by Maya pilgrims who came to Balankanche to perform ceremonies for rain and plentiful harvests. As Taube (2010:214) states, water was probably a major focus of pilgrimage and rain-making ritual among the ancient Maya.

Helmke and Awe (1998) argue that rock art in the Aktun Uayazba Kab Cave in Belize points to ancient Maya pilgrimage ritual. The name of the cave, "Cave of the Sorcerer's Handprints," was derived from several negative handprints made from black paint in one of the inner chambers. The cave entrances resemble a giant face with a mouth and two round eyes (Chládek 2011:138–41). At the cave mouth rests a flowstone boulder decorated with numerous petroglyphs, including faces, a grinning skull, and a large number

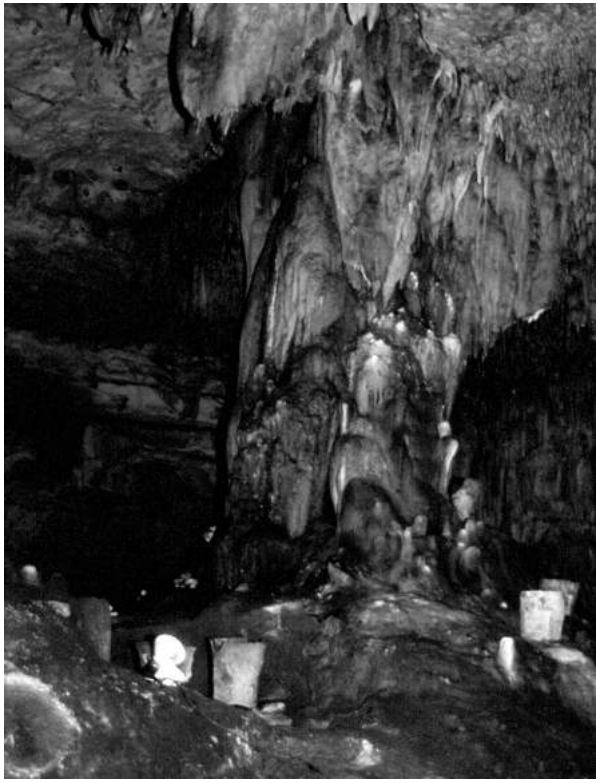

Figure 4.9. Ancient Maya pilgrimage shrine with ceramic incense burners and offering pots at a cave formation in Balankanche Cave, Yucatán, Mexico.

of footprints (Helmke and Awe 1998:fig. 12; fig. 4.12). The faces may depict earth lords, ancestors, or the master of the animals, based on contemporary Maya beliefs (Vogt 1981). These faces have open mouths, which may symbolize communication with worshipers arriving at the cave (Astor-Aguilera 2010). The painted handprints signify the pilgrims' touching of the ritual cave to contact divine forces and absorb their spiritual power. The footprints represent pilgrims arriving for ritual or the presence of deities important for the continuation of water and animal populations. Some footprints are associated with lines that may represent steps or direction of movement (Helmke and Awe 1998:163). The cave also contains carved steps used by Maya pilgrims. Archaeologists found human burials in the cave, possibly members of lineages from a nearby habitation site who entered the realm of the earth

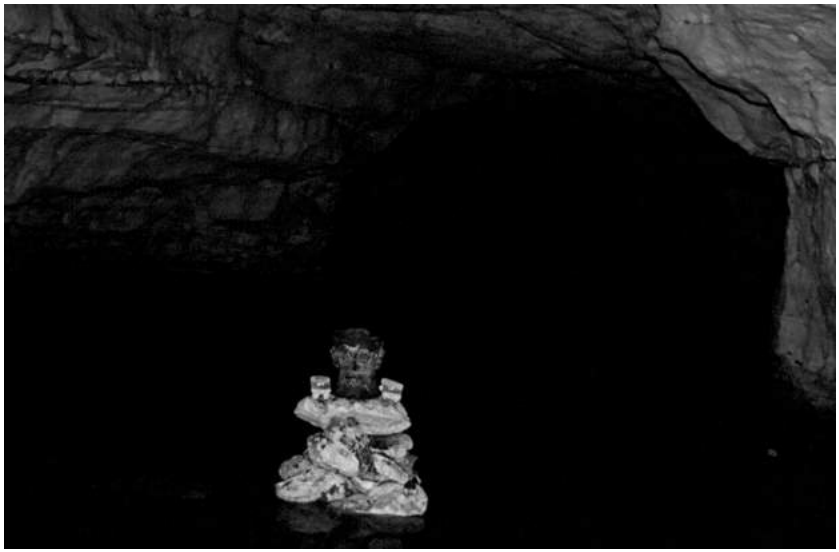

Figure 4.10. Maya shrine of piled stones in a pool at the end of a tunnel, Balankanche Cave, Yucatán, Mexico. Note the ceramic incense burner with modeled Tlaloc rain and earth god design.

lords to intercede on behalf of Maya communities (Helmke and Awe 1998:159). Pottery in the cave dates from the Preclassic to Terminal Classic periods, indicating a long time span for its ritual use.

The Jolja (also Joloniel) Cave in Chiapas was a shrine for Maya pilgrims and religious specialists during the rise of Maya civilization and is still ritually important for Ch'ol Mayas from nearby settlements. The cave is on Misopa Mountain, and the Ixtelja River exits one of the mouths of the cave (Bassie-Sweet et al. 2011). The painted designs and hieroglyphs on the wall of this cave date to the Late Preclassic and Early Classic periods (Bassie-Sweet et al. 2011; Chládek 2011:57–59; Stone 1995:87–90). One of the earliest paintings portrays Maya noblemen arriving at the cave to perform rituals while holding torches. One individual has stripes painted on his head and face like the ritual body decorations described by the Spanish for Mayas in the Chiapas lowlands (Villa Rojas 1995:461). Another individual is painted black, as is described for historic Ch'olti'-Lacandon Maya communities (Comparato 1984:20). A hieroglyph beneath these figures depicts a split mountain (witz), signifying the cave and/or the mountain where the cave is found. Another inscription dating to the Early Classic period mentions a "Lord of the

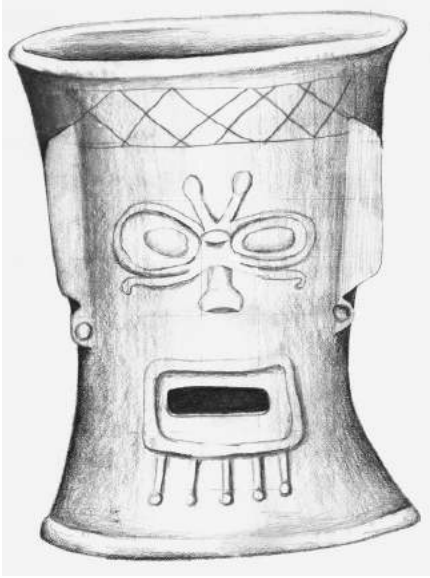

Figure 4.11. Tlaloc rain and earth god image on a Maya ceramic incense burner, Balankanche Cave, Yucatán, Mexico (drawing by Paulina Makuch after Andrews 1970:22, fig. 10a).

Mountain" (Bassie-Sweet et al. 2011), which may refer to the mountain that contains the cave or to the owner of the mountains (Brown 2005; Vogt 1981). An adjacent text mentions "arrival at a cave" (*huliy tu ch'e'en*), indicating that Maya elites organized pilgrimages to this cave (Bassie-Sweet et al. 2011). A cave near Jolja, called Yaleltsemen Cave (Stone 1995:90–91), contains a painted inscription describing the arrival (huliy) of a Maya noble of the Sib'ikte polity, which maintained territory near the cave (Chládek 2011:60). Another text at the Jolja Cave also mentions the "entering of the cave [for ritual]" by a Sib'ikte Maya lord (Chládek 2011:59).

The Preclassic Maya murals at San Bartolo in Petén illustrate the importance of Maya ritual caves in maintaining covenants with spiritual forces (Saturno et al. 2005). Archaeologists discovered the murals in a temple, and the scenes involve people conducting ceremonies as well as deities. One scene shows a ritual in front of the entrance to an animate cave on the mythical Flower Mountain (fig. 4.13; Grove 2006:279; Saturno et al. 2005:16, fig. 12) and is likely a depiction of a pilgrimage to a ritual cave. Humans arrive at the cave carrying offerings above their heads for the maize god shown with female attendants near the cave entrance. People walk to the cave on a feathered serpent road, or a serpent exiting the cave, which has black pilgrim's footprints leading to the cave. Maya artists painted this ceremonial cave in

Figure 4.12. Maya rock carvings showing a handprint, faces, and footprints on a flowstone boulder at the entrance of Aktun Uayazba Kab Cave, Belize (drawing by Christophe Helmke, courtesy of Jaime Awe and the Western Belize Regional Cave Project; Helmke and Awe 1998:fig. 12).

profile as an opening in the earth that resembles the open mouth of an animal or a supernatural being sometimes called the earth monster. The gaping mouth of this being contains stalactites for teeth, and a stylized eye can be seen over the upper jaw. Maya elites from San Bartolo likely made pilgrimages to caves in the region to perform rituals and leave offerings for the gods.

Studies of the art and hieroglyphs at Naj Tunich Cave have revealed its importance for pilgrimage ritual. The cave deposits are largely ceremonial in nature, and the Classic period hieroglyphic texts describe the "arrival at the cave" (huliy) and the "seeing" (ilaj) of rituals there by Maya noble pilgrims from several centers (Chládek 2011; Stone 1995; see fig. 2.24). Late Classic period paintings on the cave wall show Mayas walking and playing the ball game. Painted hieroglyphic texts tell of the arrival to the cave of Maya elites who performed rituals, such as fire ceremonies (Stone 1995:fig. 7-2, 178–79). A text from deep in the cave mentions the "mouth of the shrine [of the] spiritual essence/god" (*chi'il k'uh*; Chládek 2011:46), which may refer to the cave entrance or a food offering. Stone (1995:240–41) argues that Naj Tunich was a major Maya pilgrimage shrine similar to the Aztecs' Mount Tlaloc. That both elite and non-elite Mayas visited Naj Tunich for ritual purposes is revealed in the high- and low-quality cave designs. Stone suggests that Maya pilgrimages to and ceremonies at this and other ritual landscapes allowed elites to connect with the masses and their folk religion, which was commonly celebrated in smaller ceremonies in these locales. Maya elites did not depict themselves in rich

Figure 4.13. Mural depicting the maize god and attendants at the mouth of an animate cave (far left), San Bartolo, Petén, Guatemala. Note Maya pilgrims arriving on a feathered serpent path carrying offerings (far right) and footprints leading to the cave mouth (painting by Heather Hurst, courtesy of William Saturno; Saturno et al. 2005:foldout painting).

ceremonial finery in the cave, thus projecting a more humble image. The liminal context of the cave and the experience of pilgrimage rituals may have leveled socioreligious statuses. Furthermore, nobles making pilgrimages to the cave originated in several ancient Maya centers in the region and returned to the cave to carry out rites to communicate with gods and ancestors according to a cyclical calendar; thus, pilgrimage ritual at Naj Tunich may have fostered regional political alliances and social integration.

Brady (1989; Brady and Sears 2000) has also demonstrated through archaeological research that Naj Tunich Cave was an important Maya pilgrimage site. The impressive cave mouth and extensive tunnels and chambers attracted Maya pilgrims who carried out rituals related to rain, fertility, death, and the underworld. The archaeological evidence points to cyclical ritual use of the cave at the start of the rainy season (Adams and Brady 1994:175). The Maya visitors, likely under the direction of elites, constructed the walls, steps, terraces, and tombs inside the cave for ritual purposes. The impressive entry hall at the cave contains a fourteen-meter-high terrace or balcony that the Maya built to stage ceremonies near the entrance as well as a natural spring (Chládek 2011:36). At the base of this terrace rests a large limestone slab that was a focus of ceremony. One of the cave formations contains an animal carving as well (Chládek 2011:51–52). Mayas constructed masonry tombs on this terrace during the Preclassic period, and they may have visited the cave for ancestor worship and rituals to earth lords in addition to water ceremonies. Behind the main terrace lies the passage leading to the extensive cave tunnels. Just beyond this terrace, Maya worshipers built a

damn to form a pool from water flowing from the spring. Altars at cave formations and stone-block constructions exist in the deep tunnels, where Maya pilgrims carried out rituals. Naj Tunich has stalactites with faces pecked in them, possibly representing earth lords or ancestors, and positive handprints are also found in the cave (Stone 1995:187). Ceramics recovered from the Naj Tunich Cave indicate that the Maya visited it extensively from Late Preclassic to Late Classic times. However, modern pottery demonstrates that contemporary Maya populations continue to utilize the cave for rituals. Pilgrimage to Naj Tunich required the manufacture of specific types of ceramics to be used in ceremonies in the cave (Brady and Prufer 2005:373). Certain types of pottery, such as incense burners, were manufactured in cottage industries in the vicinity for consumption by Maya pilgrims beginning in Preclassic or Early Classic times.

People in the vicinity of Comitan and the ruins of Chinkultic, Chiapas, traveled to ritual caves to deposit their dead from Late Postclassic to historic times (Blom 1954; Cordan 1963:99, photo opposite p. 89). Within small caves in the hills, Maya placed urns containing human cremations, textiles, glass beads, and other artifacts, many of which were later removed by looters (fig. 4.14). The caves also contained jars, plates, and urns for offerings (Cordan 1963:95–99). Additionally, ceramic effigies were found in some caves (Cordan 1963:100, 112, photos opposite pp. 88 and 89). Explorations in one cave yielded a stone disk depicting Tlaloc (fig. 4.15), the Mesoamerican storm and rain god, who holds a lightning bolt in one hand and a water jar or hand stone dripping water in the other (Cordan 1963:98, plate facing p. 64). The artifact was likely used in rain rituals at this entrance to Tlalocan, the world of water and the dead (López Austin 1997). Maya pilgrims returned to these caves to bury their dead and perform rites for their ancestors who had entered the otherworld to mediate with deities on behalf of their communities. Maya pilgrims still visited the caves in the mid-twentieth century to undertake rain and agricultural rituals (Cordan 1963:100–101). We know that caves in the hills near Palenque served a similar function due to the presence of tall, flanged ceramic incense burners depicting underworld deities, perhaps earth lords, and ancestors (Rands and Rands 1959:251).

ANCIENT RUINS AND MODERN MAYAS

Ethnographic research shows that Maya ruins are important ritual landscapes. Early explorers in the Southern Maya Region first described Lacandon Maya

Figure 4.14. Polychrome jar containing a cremation burial, offerings, and textiles from Cieneguilla Cave, Chiapas, Mexico (drawn by Paulina Makuch after Wauchope 1942:fig. 1; see Blom 1954:fig. 3).

Figure 4.15. Carving of the Tlaloc rain and earth god on a small round stone from a cave near the Jatate River, Chiapas, Mexico. Note hand stone or jar with streams of water in the right hand and lightning bolt in the left hand of the god (drawing by Paulina Makuch after Cordan 1963:plate facing p. 64).

rituals and ceremonial offerings in ancient Maya ruins (*tunich* or "stone[s]" and "[buildings]/ruins" in Lacandon Mayan; Boremanse 1998b:201), including Yaxchilan and Piedras Negras. One aged Lacandon Maya mentioned that the ruins of Seibal in Petén were a ritual site associated with his ancestors before the arrival of Europeans (Maler 1908:27). Archaeologists probing ancient Maya sites in the late nineteenth century came across the residues of Lacandon rituals, such as ceramic god pots in structures, near carved stone monuments, and on top of low house mounds. Lacandon *incensarios* consist of ceramic bowls with modeled anthropomorphic faces on the rims showing large noses, hair, and ears or ear plugs; painted designs on the front and inside of the vessel; and

occasionally modeled arms and legs (Palka 2005b; see fig. 4.23). Explorers described Lacandon pilgrims visiting ruins to burn incense, pray, or dance, which continued into the late twentieth century. Along with the Lacandon Mayas' acceptance of Western beliefs, the ruins became overrun with tourists, archaeologists, and nonlocal Maya settlers, which contributed to the rapid decline of Lacandon rites in them.

Maya ruins were seen by Lacandon male ritual specialists as homes of the gods. For example, Lacandon Mayas from Naha believed that an ancient Maya ruin near the modern town of Sebol was the home of their god Kanank'ash, who is the guardian or lord of the forest (Petryshyn 1968:18). Lacandon religious specialists left god pots and offerings in a standing building at the site. The ability to make god pots was given to the Lacandon Maya by the gods so that people could communicate with deities and give them offerings of incense in the pots (Boremanse 1998b:202). Following rites in ruins, Lacandon men take a small stone ("u k'anche k'uh" or "the seat of the god") to place in their god pots back home so that the gods will descend to the god pots and partake in the ritual offerings, such as incense, food, and drink (Boremanse 1999:241). Stones from ruins were felt by Lacandon Mayas to belong to celestial deities, and stones from caves and cliffs belonged to earth gods. This practice of removing stones to take back to settlements is similar to people's removal of sacred material, often stones or dirt, from pilgrimage shrines across the globe.

Some authors mention that the Classic Maya site of Palenque held cosmological significance for twentieth-century Lacandon (McGee 1990; Petryshyn 1968:12). Lacandon Mayas describe how gods were born here, which has interesting parallels with Classic period hieroglyphic texts at the site that emphasize the birth of local gods associated with Palenque kings (Houston 1996; Stuart 2005). Chan K'in, a Lacandon elder and religious specialist, recounted how specific stone structures at Palenque belonged to particular Lacandon gods (Perera and Bruce 1985). Furthermore, he stated that human skeletons found in tombs belonged to Lacandon deities. Rather than demonstrating a direct link to the ancient Maya at Palenque, however, the association of gods with buildings at Maya ruins was a commonly held belief among the Lacandon Maya (McGee 1990, 2005). For example, northern Lacandon Mayas believed stone structures at the site of Yaxchilan to be the homes of specific gods (Soustelle 1961), particularly celestial gods (Boremanse 1998b:201–2), and communication with these gods was thought to be more effective at their homes.

For the Chiapas highlands, Holland (1964:302–3, 305) indicates that Tzotzil Maya ceremonial mountains contain the archaeological remains of their ancestors. In a Tzotzil origin myth people migrated from a place in the east where a palace was built from stone, which may describe an ancient ruin (Holland 1964:302), and one ritual mountain visited by the Tzotzil Maya is important because of ruins there (Vogt 1965:48–49, 1981:131–32). This mountain, called Its'inal Muk'ta Vits, lies thirty-eight kilometers from other local sacred mountains surrounding Zinacantan. The top of the mountain contains artificial terraces, and an ancient temple platform can be seen on its summit (Vogt 1981:132). Tzotzil religious specialists make pilgrimages to shrines located on or near the ancient temple on the summit to pray for rain. It seems that they believe rain deities or gods controlling rain reside in the ruins on this mountain. Tzotzil Mayas from Zinacantan also visit a cross shrine on a hill covered with artifacts near their community (Ch'ivit Krus or "Market Cross"), where their ancient market was located (McVicker 1974:549). Another Tzotzil Maya mountain called Junal has a ruined pyramid on its summit (Holland 1964:304). Tzotzil ritual practitioners placed wooden images of ancestors in a cave near the top of this mountain. During rituals, they offered incense to the mouths and eyes of the images to feed them. They also buried their dead on this mountain. These practices are similar to K'iche (Quiche) Maya rituals in Guatemala in which images of ancestral gods were placed on mountains with pyramids on their summits to mark their territory (Holland 1964:304–5). These gods, both worshipped and feared, shouted down to the K'iche from their mountain abodes.

Blom and La Farge (1926:253–54; Lee 1972:23) discovered that contemporary Tzeltal Mayas from the village of Cololte carried out rituals on top of a pyramidal mound called Hocuchupac near the ancient Maya ruin of Tonina (fig. 4.16). The mound was on top of a hill with a sheer cliff on one side. At this shrine, Tzeltal Mayas created an altar of loose rock that contained an anthropomorphic stone figure, and Maya pilgrims placed offerings of ceramic vessels filled with copal incense, rows of candles, small strips of colored paper, and pine needles at the foot of the stone. As they did during other festivals on specific calendar dates, Tzeltal Mayas visited this figure to pray for rain (Blom and La Farge 1926:366). Other Tzeltal Mayas near Ocosingo erected a wooden cross and pine boughs in a shrine on top of a mound on a modified hill that was located near a cave altar (Blom and La Farge 1926:252). At the shrine on this modified hill, Tzeltal Mayas left offerings and burned incense to the god of the mountain (Hun Ahau) to cure the sick (Blom and

Figure 4.16. Tzeltal Maya shrine with offerings near a standing stone on the summit of a ruined Maya temple (also perceived as a hill), Cololte, Chiapas, Mexico (after Blom and La Farge 1926:fig. 200).

La Farge 1926:373). Tzeltal Mayas made an altar with two wooden crosses in an artificial depression on another prominent modified hill called Campomtik (Much Yellow Incense), where worshipers burned incense and fired rockets (Blom and La Farge 1926:255–56). The upper one hundred meters of this hill are terraced with stones and earth in thirteen levels, and its summit was artificially leveled (see fig. 6.13). Additionally, Tzeltal Mayas from the region held fiestas with dancing and drinking and offered candles on top of the pyramid at Chacalchib (Blom and La Farge 1926:366–67).

In central Petén, the Itzaj Maya speak of the ritual importance of the ruins of Tikal, located just to the north of their communities on Lake Peten Itza (see fig. 1.11). The name of the site and the historic Maya village found there (Ti Ikal) can be glossed as "Place of Wind/Voices," which were heard at night (Palka 2005b:148; Tesucún Chan and Tesucún 1999:14). Based on information he gathered from his visits to local Yucatec and Itzaj villages, Maler (1908:56) glosses the site's name as "Where the Voices of the Ancestors Are Heard." The late nineteenth-century Mayas living at Tikal moved there to communicate with ancestors and asked for protection and prosperity by burning

incense in ceramic vessels in the temples. They also may have placed some graffiti and handprints on the walls of extant buildings. These people attempted to maintain world order during conflicts following the Caste War of Yucatán. Modern Itzaj Mayas continue to believe that their ancestors inhabit Tikal, but they can no longer hear their ancestors' voices in the ruins because these were excavated (Atran et al. 2004:49). Itzaj Mayas also recount the stories of their grandfathers connecting Tikal with spirits called "Owners of the Forest" (Atran et al. 2004:49–50). Great men (*nukuch winikoo'* or "past people/ancestors") lived at Tikal and stored food there. The *'arux* ("duende" or "dwarf" and "owner of the forest") lived in caves (*u jol chaltunej*) in the forest near the site, and Itzaj Mayas state that the radios and televisions of tourists have frightened these beings away as well.

Ethnographic Studies of Maya Pilgrimage to Ruins

Mayas are actively reclaiming ancient Maya ruins as central ritual landscapes for the maintenance of their cultural identity. Large numbers of Mayas in Guatemala, including the Itzaj and Q'eqchi', make pilgrimages to the ruins of Tikal to conduct rituals for their ancestors at these portals to the otherworld. In the main plaza they build large fires and burn incense. In highland Chiapas, Tzotzil or Tzeltal Mayas light candles as offerings on a large stone block on the hill at the archaeological site of Moxviquil (Ian Hollingshead, personal communication, 2011). And fascinating details about Lacandon beliefs and rituals at Maya ruins may be found at Mensabak. With local collaborators, we identified a large ruin in Lacandon fields. They chose the name Noh K'uh for the site, or "Great God/Spiritual Essence," who is an important deity related to Lacandon fields and harvests (Tozzer 1907:97). Like other gods, Noh K'uh resides in Maya ruins. Lacandon collaborators showed us an old god house within the ruins of Noh K'uh that has Lacandon incense burners buried in the soil. Perhaps Lacandon men carried out rituals to Noh K'uh in this god house.

Lacandon Maya men perform "necessary rites of the moment" in ruins, which include curing the sick by seeking the gods' assistance or asking for forgiveness (see fig. 1.1). They also have annual ceremonies in ruins that revolve around the agricultural cycle, such as the "rites of the first fruits" after the harvest (Boremanse 1999:243, 2007:125). Fortunately, explorers witnessed Lacandon pilgrimages to Maya ruins such as Yaxchilan and recorded them (Charnay 1887:423, 443; Maler 1901:162; see fig. 1.12). At this ruin, Lacandon

men donned headdresses made from the stuffed pelts of toucans and performed the "dance of the toucan" to a sacred drum or *tunkul*. They also danced before the stone carving called Kanal Winik (Man of Heaven) or Hachakyum (one of thirteen sky gods; Petryshyn 2005:329). Yaxchilan is important to the Lacandon Maya for it is in the heart of their forest domain, and the site contains sculptures depicting their gods (Soustelle 1970:34–35). Lacandon Mayas call the site Chi' Xokla' U Yatoch Hach Ak Yum ("Mouth/Entrance of the Usumacinta River at the House of Hachakyum"; Boremanse 2007:121), indicating that they perceive this ruin as a passage, border, or "shrine." A similar concept of entrance is seen in the place-name for Piedras Negras (Yokib, "Entrance/Portal/Mouth") and the nearby Boca de Cerro (Mouth of the Mountain), where the river exits a range of hills. When Hachakyum returns the head of a statue decapitated by loggers at Yaxchilan, say the Lacandon Maya, a solar eclipse will occur, thus heralding the end of the world (Boremanse 1998b, 2007; Soustelle 1970:34). By burning incense at the statue, the Lacandon Maya forestall the destruction of the world and all people.

According to the Lacandon Maya, a number of gods resided at Yaxchilan before they left for the spiritual realm (fig. 4.17). However, their energies are still tethered to structures and monuments there (Boremanse 1998b:201–2), and so Yaxchilan became the primary pilgrimage site for Lacandon men beginning in the mid- to late nineteenth century (fig. 4.18). The site was the residence of high-ranking deities with solar and sky connotations, one of which was called Hach Bilam (and which gave the site its name; Boremanse 1998b:207; Soustelle 1961). Lacandon ritual specialists conduct ceremonies at the homes of specific gods at Yaxchilan, such as Itsanal, who lives in Structure 19 (McGee 2005:67–72). Yaxchilan also became elevated in Lacandon ritual landscapes since it effectively demarcated the land of the Lacandon from increasing number of outsiders traveling on the Usumacinta River.

McGee (2005) participated in a Lacandon Maya pilgrimage to Yaxchilan organized by elders from Naha. They made the trip to give offerings to their creator deity, Hachakyum, and to teach a young Lacandon man about their beliefs regarding the ruins. They taught him about the deities that reside at Yaxchilan and the associated mythologies, particularly with regard to world creation and destruction. The site is also located to the east of Lacandon settlements, linking it to the rising sun (McGee 2005:66) and the movement of pilgrims. Lacandon ritual specialists recount their beliefs regarding Yaxchilan as they move through the ruins, leaving offerings of incense, palm fronds, and anthropomorphic rubber figurines and praying to the deities.

Figure 4.17. Lacandon Maya shrine in a ruined building, Yaxchilan, Chiapas, Mexico.

They splatter the rubber figurines with red achiote dye and burn them to symbolize human sacrifices, which sustain the gods, transform the figurines into the gods' servants, and help maintain human health (Bruce 1973). Before giving offerings, Lacandon pilgrims wash their hands and change into clean white clothes to be ritually purified (McGee 2005:70). The offerings of the Lacandon Maya for their gods are given in exchange for the well-being of their families and the fertility of their fields (McGee 2005:64). Additionally, offerings to Hachakyum forestall his eventual destruction of the current world (McGee 2005:72).

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF PILGRIMAGE TO MAYA RUINS

Archaeological evidence demonstrates the presence of Maya pilgrims in ancient ruins. For instance, archaeologists discovered whole ceramic plates with god faces adorning vessel supports in addition to fragments of incense burners and figurines overlying constructions at the site of El Mirador in Petén (Hansen et al. 2008). Late Postclassic Mayas visiting El Mirador left these ceramics as offerings to gods and ancestors residing in the long-abandoned structures. Maya pilgrims were drawn to the temples because they are the highest points in the surrounding swampy terrain. Yet the

Figure 4.18. Classic Maya stone altar and historic Lacandon Maya ceramic incense burners from Yaxchilan, Chiapas, Mexico (after Maler 1903:plate LXXX).

Maya also visited the structures because they are not natural. The exposed masonry walls, sculptures at their bases, and artifacts on the surface demonstrated to Maya pilgrims that the site was inhabited by ancient people or perhaps gods. It is important to note that the Postclassic Maya journeyed some distance to reach El Mirador. The nearest Late Postclassic sites were located several days' walk in any direction, and many pilgrims probably came from the Itzaj Maya region in central Petén. Some of the first ritual landscapes described by Spanish chroniclers in Petén were Maya ruins. Around 1695, Spanish friars described the site of Tanxulucmul (Tan Xuluc Mul) as a place in the forests near Peten Itza with ponds (*aguadas*) and high buildings made of stone (Vargas Pacheco 2004:49). This site may have been the Maya ruins of Tikal, El Mirador, or Yaxha, all which have aguadas. The priests reported that conquest-era Itzaj Mayas "adored a very infamous idol" at this ruin, which may have been a ceramic effigy incense burner or figurine in a ruined temple or perhaps a stone monument. At Tikal, archaeologists found whole vessels on the floors and in burials in large temples (Adams and Trik 1961; fig. 4.19). The vessels were associated with copal incense and smoke on the walls of the temples. The excavators believe that the pottery was left by Late Postclassic and historic Maya ritual practitioners and pilgrims from Lake Peten Itza (Adams and Trik 1961:128; Culbert 1974; Rice and Rice 2009). Some offerings can be attributed to late

nineteenth-century Yucatec and Lacandon Mayas living at Tikal (Moholy-Nagy 2012; Palka 2005b), who sought the protection of deities residing in the ruins during a time of conflict and great economic change.

The Postclassic and historic Maya pilgrims to Tikal likely created some of the incised and painted graffiti in the numerous buildings (Hutson 2011:406–8; Trik and Kampen 1983). The graffiti resemble pilgrim's drawings, scrapes and gouges, and rock art at ritual sites around the world (fig. 4.20; Adair 1978; Hedges 2005; Hutson 2011:408; McCorriston 2011:68; Stone 1995; Vikan 2010:72–73). Pilgrims incise or paint symbols, sketches, and designs related to deities, religious beliefs, rituals, and their experiences at the shrines. Importantly, visitors incise images in building walls and monuments at pilgrimage sites in order to remove fragments to take back to their homes. People also leave their marks as blessings or votive offerings at pilgrimage shrines. Graffiti can be part of the socialization processes for children (Hutson 2011) or young pilgrims. The designs at Tikal show people performing rituals, people walking, deities, and ritual structures and reflect differing artistic quality and cultural knowledge—evidence of the presence of Maya pilgrims of various social classes, ages, and periods. Graffiti at Tikal were also incised or gouged quickly and superimposed on earlier layers as visitors left their marks at the shrines and removed sacred dust from plaster walls to take with them. Certain buildings were targeted for graffiti, further supporting the interpretation of their origins in pilgrimage ritual at god houses. Furthermore, graffiti and large red positive and negative handprints found high in the buildings belonged to adult Maya pilgrims and not children (Trik and Kampen 1983:14, 97, 104).

The Maya site of Tonina, Chiapas, was an important ritual place for Postclassic and historic Maya pilgrims because of its ruins and the fact that the site rests on an impressive hill with a spring that overlooks the valley of Ocosingo. Historic Tzeltal and Ch'ol Maya populations went to the ruins to leave pottery and offerings in the buildings (Becquelin and Baudez 1979). They also built shrines and buried their dead here (fig. 4.21). Their artifacts and burials have been found in large quantities at Tonina, which speaks to the importance of this site for Maya worshipers. So many post-abandonment vessels were found at Tonina that archaeologists created a new ceramic phase for these ceremonial finds (Becquelin and Baudez 1979). No Postclassic or historic domestic structures have been discovered at the site, thus the ceremonial deposits and constructions must have been made by Maya pilgrims. Furthermore, hand impressions on a stucco facade apparently marked pilgrims' visits and their touching of sacred material (fig. 4.22). The Tzeltal

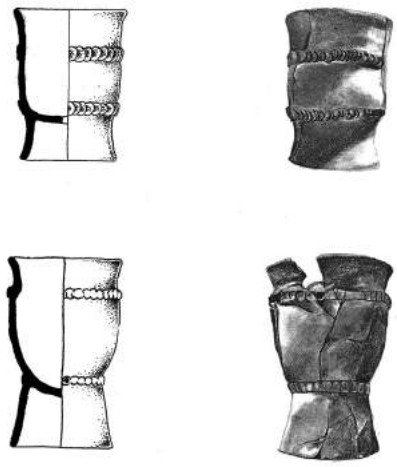

Figure 4.19. Late Postclassic to historic ceramic incense burners left by Maya pilgrims in a temple, Tikal, Petén, Guatemala (drawing by Paulina Makuch after Adams and Trik 1961:128).

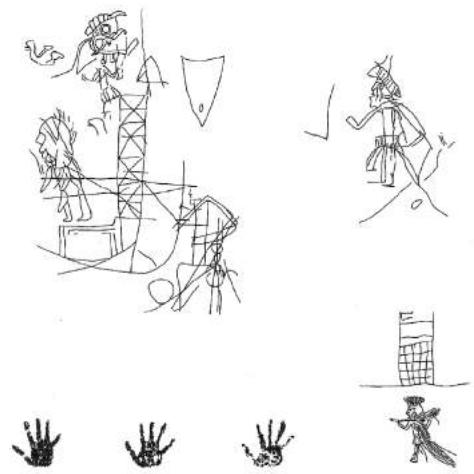

Figure 4.20. Maya pilgrim graffiti, gouges, and red handprints on the wall of Str. 6F-27, Tikal, Petén, Guatemala. Note possible depictions of walking pilgrims (drawing by Paulina Makuch after Trik and Kampen 1983:fig. 97).

Maya have named the site Tonina Ahaw Cab, or "Lord of the Hand" (Calnek 1988:46), which may refer to the handprints or to the hands of spiritual forces who created the site. Additionally, a stone celt recovered here bears a carved human footprint (fig. 4.22; Vela 2005:18)—a common symbol of pilgrimage. This artifact may have been left at the site as an offering to resident spiritual forces or as a pilgrim's blessing and payment.

Postclassic ritual ceramics were also identified in ritual structures at the Maya ruins of Piedras Negras located on the Usumacinta River in northwest

Figure 4.21. Small pilgrim shrine attached to an ancient terrace wall at the Maya ruins of Tonina, Chiapas, Mexico.

Petén (Butler 2005). The finds include Late Postclassic pottery from sites in Tabasco and Campeche, including long-handled incense burners. Late Postclassic Maya pilgrims must have traveled to Piedras Negras since no late occupations have been discovered at the site. Postclassic ceramics were also reported downriver at Yaxchilan (López Varela 1989:181). No domestic Postclassic habitation sites have been found at the site, thus the offerings must have been left by Maya pilgrims. Investigators at Piedras Negras also identified historic Lacandon incense burners or god pots on the floors of a temple (Butler 2005). These incensarios may have been placed by Lacandon Mayas living nearby over one hundred years ago. The Lacandon incense burners resemble those reported at nearby ruins of Yaxchilan in the late nineteenth century (Maler 1901).

Historic Lacandon Maya god pots are a common type of offering found on the surface or in temples of ancient Maya ruins. These ceramic incense burners have even been discovered by archaeologists in Maya centers and ancient house mounds. Lacandon incensarios can be distinguished from other incense burner styles, including the so-called Lacandon type found in eastern Petén, Belize, and southern Yucatán (Thompson 1977), which belong to earlier historic Maya groups. While clearing off mounds in the Laguna de Tigre national park to the south of Piedras Negras, archaeologists happened upon several Lacandon ceramic incense burners on a low platform (Morales 2000). Another Lacandon incense burner (fig. 4.23), which had carved

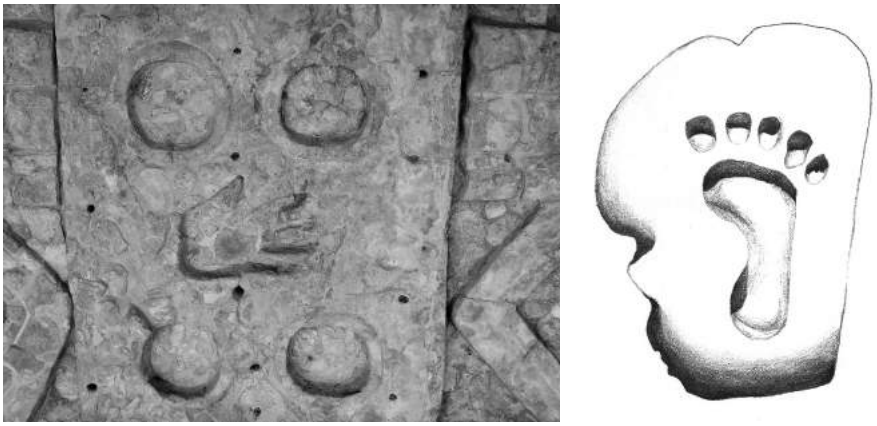

Figure 4.22. Handprint on the stucco facade of a terrace wall and a stone celt with a footprint at the Maya ruins of Tonina, Chiapas, Mexico (drawing by Paulina Makuch after Vela 2005:18; not to scale).

symbols under the modeled human face on the rim, was recovered from the top of an ancient Maya house mound in the Sierra del Lacandon national park in western Petén (Charles Golden, personal communication, 2005). These vessels resemble Lacandon incense burners from the late nineteenth century. Interestingly, Lacandon religious specialists placed these incensarios on low house mounds instead of ruined temples during pilgrimage rituals because they recognized the small platforms as unusual landscape features that they associated with mythological events and homes of spiritual forces. Investigators with the Mensabak Archaeological Project and Lacandon collaborators discovered a historic Lacandon Maya incense burner placed in a hole in the wall of a Preclassic masonry temple on the summit of Mirador Mountain (Palka and Sánchez Balderas 2012; see fig. 1.1). Lacandon informants stated that male religious specialists once climbed to the top of Mirador Mountain to take small stones from the temple back to their settlements to place in their incense burners and thus animate or sanctify them. They sought these stones during healing rites and left the incense burner after burning incense in it to pay the resident gods for the stones. The incense burner was also an offering to the gods so they would heal the sick. Additionally, archaeologists have identified historic Lacandon god pots placed in ruined structures, or houses of divine forces, around Lake Mensabak over the last one hundred years by Lacandon religious specialists during pilgrimage rites.

MONOLITHS IN CONTEMPORARY MAYA CULTURE

Maya worshipers, like other groups in Mesoamerica, stop at boulders and exposed bedrock for rituals along pilgrimage routes (see fig. 3.12). Boulders and bedrock mark places where divine beings and people turned to stone, where mythical and historical events occurred, or where spiritual essences can be contacted. For instance, La Farge (1947:66) describes how a Q'anhob'al Maya informant recalled a large stone with a painted face where the "Lacandones" hid during a raid on their community. The face on this stone symbolized the presence of past Ch'olti'-Lacandon raiders or Yucatec-speaking Lacandon visitors. Maya beliefs regarding monoliths recall the importance of Maya stone stelae and altars depicting rulers in ancient centers (see figs. 2.28 and 3.11). Maya monoliths have long been important for the recollection of myth-histories and for communication with spiritual forces.

Large rocks were incorporated into the ritual landscapes of the Tzotzil Maya if they had a distinctive size or unusual shape or if they were associated with a water hole, mountain, or cave (Vogt 1981:129–30, 133). The Tzotzil believe that large rocks and rock formations were once alive or that they represent priests who turned into rocks. In other instances, it is said that people in the past moved in and out of particular boulders (Vogt 1981:130, 1992:66), suggesting that they function as portals to the otherworld. One large cubical limestone boulder called Muk'ta Ton (Large Rock) in Tzotzil Mayan is found at a pilgrimage shrine at the base of the ritual mountain named Muxul Wits (Vogt 1981:130). Another flat-top boulder, Bolom Ton (Jaguar Rock), which is located in pasture near a church, is the place where jaguar impersonators are symbolically sacrificed at a cavelike cavity on the side of the rock. Additionally, a formation of limestone found near a ritual location at a water hole in Zinacantan is called Shu Vo' (Rock That Pokes Upward) by the Tzotzil and is an important stop on a pilgrimage route (Vogt 1981:130). The Tzotzil Maya believe that the rock was alive when people first undertook lineage rituals at this place. They state that people have either gotten lost in these rocks, that the formation is an ancestral god in disguise, or that lightning came out of the spring and killed the energies in the rock, making it the way it is today.

The Itzaj Maya also recall tales involving large stones (Tesucún Chan and Tesucún 1999:27). In one myth, two people embracing on the shore of Lake Peten Itza turned into impressive monoliths. Later, these rocks were seen in the lake, or floating on it, and they were so large that canoes could not pass by. The place where these rocks rested came to be called Piedra (Rock) de los

Figure 4.23. Historic Lacandon Maya ceramic *incensarios* or "god pots" from Petén, Guatemala: from a house mound in the Sierra de Lacandon National Park (top; photo courtesy of Charles Golden), and from a boulder shrine at Lake Mangal (bottom); not to scale.

Compadres. The Ch'orti' Maya also believe that boulders and outcrops of rock are related to people who lived in the past. When they undertake pilgrimages to the cathedral at Esquipulas to visit the image of the Black Christ and make their requests, Ch'orti' people initially visit the Rock of the Compadres (Kendall 1991:142–43). This shrine consists of two overlapping stones on a pilgrimage trail that are said to be the petrified remains of male and female kin who broke native taboos by having illicit sexual relations. Ch'orti' Mayas leave offerings here, construct miniature towns of twigs and leaves, and throw stones at the large rocks.

Modern Maya Pilgrimage to Boulder Shrines

Brown (2009) demonstrates the ritual importance of large rocks for the Tz'utujil, K'iche', and Kaqchikel Maya of highland Guatemala in her ethnoarchaeological research on hunting shrines near Lake Atitlan. She discusses the physical features of the shrines, their ritual functions, Maya ceremonial utilization of boulders and bedrock, and the importance of animal bone caches left for earth lords. The creation of life from animal and human bones at the shrines has been important in Mesoamerican cultures from ancient times to the present (Brown 2009:56–58). In her case studies, Brown (2009:37–51) also describes Maya boulder and bedrock outcrop shrines in the hills surrounding Maya communities. Mayas typically selected a rock for a shrine if it had an alcove at its base, a crawl space, or if an overhang prevented rain from reaching the offerings. Some boulder surfaces serve as altars where Maya stop to perform rituals to ask permission of the earth deities to visit the principal hunting shrine (Brown 2004:34–35). At these altars they deposit ceramic sherds, animal bone, ground stone, and other archaeological objects that they have found or used in rituals. Other portable offerings consisted of organic items, such as food, drink, and animal bone (Brown 2004:39). Furthermore, areas that the Maya keep clear by sweeping refuse away are important for ritual activities during interactions with spiritual essences found at these shrines (Brown and Emery 2008:324).

Most of the contemporary Maya hunting shrines are located at boulders (Brown 2009:51). For pilgrims visiting the shrines, these unusual rock formations are the actual homes or entrances to the caves of the earth lord who is the owner, guardian, or master of the animals (Brown 2009:37, 44–54). These portals into the spiritual realm are in the peripheries of settlements because of their dangerous, wild, socially marginal, and spiritual characteristics (Brown 2004:54; Brown and Emery 2008). Maya men travel about two kilometers from their homes to these rock shrines for hunting rituals, and people and spiritual essences must maintain their close relationships for their mutual benefit and to avoid negative outcomes, such as unsuccessful hunting (Brown and Emery 2008:304). The offerings of food, liquor, candles, and music placate the owner of the animals, who releases animals from his house to the hunters on the earth's surface. Over time, Maya worshipers place piles of animal bones near the rocks so the owner of the animals can regenerate game animals, which are important for their diet.

In another example, monumental sculpture at El Baúl on the Pacific coast

of Guatemala attracts contemporary K'iche Mayas to the ruins for ritual purposes. One shrine consists of a large boulder worked in the form of a three-dimensional human face protruding from the earth, called the "King of the K'iche" (fig. 4.24). The K'iche Maya also worship at other large sculptures showing standing persons (Ritzenthaler 1963:109; see fig. 3.18), one of which is the "King's Wife." Maya worshipers travel to the site to burn incense and leave offerings of flowers, candles, and alcohol in front of or on the stone monuments. K'iche Mayas pray before the monuments and kiss them while consuming alcohol. Some pilgrims have their backs flogged with branches during the rituals to pay for their transgressions. Mayas who visit this shrine state that they give offerings and prayer to ancestral lords to ask for something they want, such as good health, children, protection, abundant crops, and money, in addition to forgiveness for their sins (Ritzenthaler 1963:110).

In highland Chiapas, the Tzotzil Maya of Chenalho carried out ceremonies at an ancient, large stone carved in the form of a seated human figure with crossed arms (Lee 1972). This fallen stone, named Jmetic Lubton (Our Mother Tired Lady) by the Tzotzil, rests on a hill where Classic Maya crypt burials are found. The Tzotzil Maya also may have left offerings and buried their dead here since archaeologists recovered historic glass beads and a white ceramic bowl above the Classic period burials (Lee 1972:9–11). Archaeologists found candle wax, burnt copal incense, and pine boughs for a ritual enclosure near the stone sculpture. They learned that the sculpture marks a station in a biannual pilgrimage by Tzotzil Mayas to "raise up the angel" (Lee 1972:15). Tzotzil ritual specialists have made offerings, prayed, and played music to deities associated with this sculpture to halt sickness, bring rain for crops, stop wind and fungus from damaging corn, and protect settlements from earthquakes (Lee 1972:16).

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF MAYA RITUAL MONOLITHS

Boulders and outcrops of bedrock were significant ritual landscapes in past Maya societies, yet they have not received as much attention from archaeologists as caves or cenotes. Rock carvings and paintings on boulders at archaeological shrines signal their ceremonial nature, and carved boulders, which can be categorized as a specific kind of rock art, are found at ceremonial centers. For instance, Preclassic boulder carvings are found at Takalik Abaj in Guatemala (Sharer and Traxler 2006:192, 247; see fig. 2.27). These

Figure 4.24. Boulder sculpture and contemporary Maya earth lord shrine, El Baúl, Guatemala. Note burnt offerings and bundles of flowers near the figure's mouth.

sculptures depict human heads, anthropomorphic figures with potbellies, zoomorphs, and deities. Interestingly, many monuments have cupules and gouges on their surfaces made by pilgrims removing material. Other stones show Olmec influence, like at Pijijapan in Chiapas and Chalchuapa in El Salvador, and portray individuals walking, possibly on a pilgrimage. These carvings frequently depict people or deities traveling with bundles, banners, or offerings (Ekholm-Miller 1973; Navarette 1974; Sharer and Traxler 2006:169; Stone 1976:44). One carved monolith (fig. 4.25), possibly from San Antonio Suchitepequez or La Blanca on the south coast of Guatemala, shows an Olmec deity in a contorted position (Tate 1995:62–64, fig. 28). A set of footprints flank the central figure's face, which may symbolize the arrival or the presence of a deity or pilgrims at the shrine where this carving was found. Interestingly, footprints near the heads of central figures on Olmec monuments occur throughout southern Mesoamerica (Gutiérrez and Pye 2010:45, fig. 2.9; Navarrete 1974).

One Olmec rock art shrine was discovered in the hills bordering the lowlands of eastern Chiapas near the Maya pilgrimage site of Chinkultic (Cordan 1963; Palacios 1928). This sanctuary, called the Xoc site (fig. 4.26), consists of

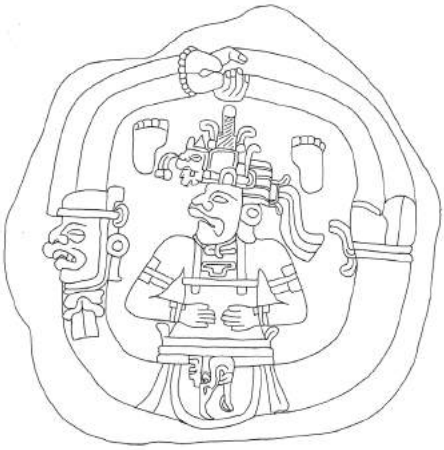

Figure 4.25. Olmec carved monolith (Shook Altar) possibly from San Antonio Suchitepequez, Guatemala. Note footprints to the sides of the figure's head (drawing by Paulina Makuch after Tate 1995:fig. 28).

Preclassic and Classic period structures, including temples and a ball court, found near a low-relief Olmec design carved on the face of a large boulder (Ekholm-Miller 1973). The boulder has an alcove at its base where ritual specialists placed offerings. This carving received worshippers from the Preclassic period until Late Postclassic or historic times; explorers discovered diagnostic pottery of these periods and a protohistoric copper axe at its base (Cordan 1963:108). The carving is located near cliffs, hills, and streams. A cave and a waterfall are also found close to the boulder (Cordan 1963:101, 111). The design represents an Olmec deity or a noble impersonating a god. This figure was shown walking, or perhaps standing, while carrying a ceremonial bundle, tablet, or offering in the left arm and a baton, banner, or scroll in the right hand. It is conceivable that the image shows a pilgrim arriving to this shrine to perform rituals, leave offerings, or bring trade goods.

The stone sarcophagus at Palenque represents a Classic period Maya ritual monolith par excellence, like other large stone carvings at the site. The Maya created the sarcophagus for their king Pakal from a megalithic piece of limestone (Stuart and Stuart 2008:98, 138). They could have buried the king in wood, cloth, or the earth. However, limestone is permanent, and it became the sacred monolithic receptacle for the dead ruler. The place where the Maya placed the body of the dead king in the limestone block was hollowed out in the form of a uterus, symbolizing the rebirth of the king in the stone. The sides of the carved sarcophagus bear earth symbols and ancestors emerging as plants from splits in the earth or the actual monolith. The sarcophagus lid

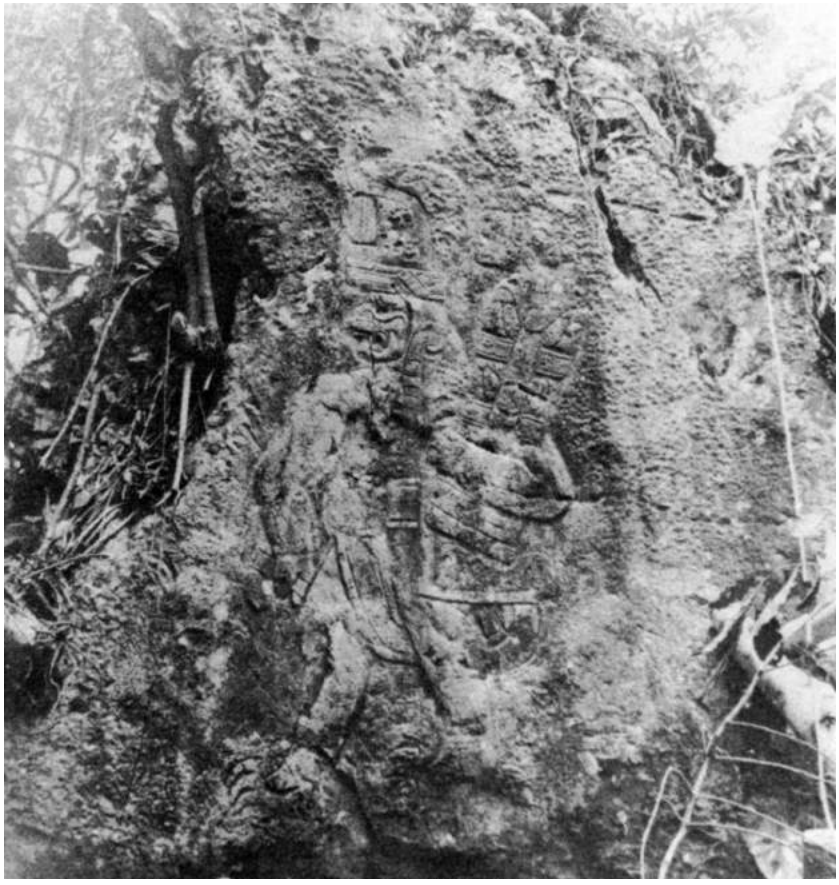

Figure 4.26. Olmec carving of a walking noble or god on a boulder at the Xoc site near the Jatate River, Chiapas, Mexico (after Ekholm-Miller 1973:9, fig. 8).

shows Hanab Pakal being reborn from the earth as a sacred maize tree. The use of this imagery on the limestone monolith of the sarcophagus demonstrates the symbolic connections between Maya elites, ancestors, and natural stone. The sarcophagus illustrates how the Maya were able to effectively communicate with their ancestors through the use of ritual monoliths (Astor-Aguilera 2010).

At Piedras Negras, the ancient Maya carved on a large upright boulder that resembles a stela or altar on the banks of the Usumacinta River (fig. 4.27). Its location near the river at the entrance of the site is significant. The carving depicts two Maya nobles, or possibly deities, facing each other while seated

Figure 4.27. Carved boulder with two seated figures (ancestors?) on the Usumacinta River at the Maya site of Piedras Negras, Petén, Guatemala.

within a cartouche. One figure holds an offering or possibly a codex (Maler 1901:42). This scene may indicate that these figures performed a ritual at the site, and Mayas arriving by canoe may have left offerings at this carved boulder. Upriver at Yaxchilan, the ancient Maya removed a large stalactite from a cave, carved designs and hieroglyphs on it, then erected it on a platform in front of the main temples. The Maya obtained this impressive stone during a pilgrimage to a cave and brought it to Yaxchilan for ritual purposes. Contemporary Lacandon Mayas state that this stalactite is important since it represents an umbilicus connecting the earth and sky (McGee 2005). Another example of a ritual monolith, a substantial limestone outcrop displaying carvings, is found near the Maler Causeway at Tikal, Petén. This causeway was a major processional road between monumental elite Maya temples at the site core. The large carving on the monolith depicts the capture of a Maya lord who is shown standing while bound with ropes (Martin 2003:31). A seated lord shown at a larger scale to the left may be the bound lord's captor and possibly a Tikal noble. Martin (2003:32) characterizes this deeply incised bedrock monument as "the second-largest extant Maya carving."

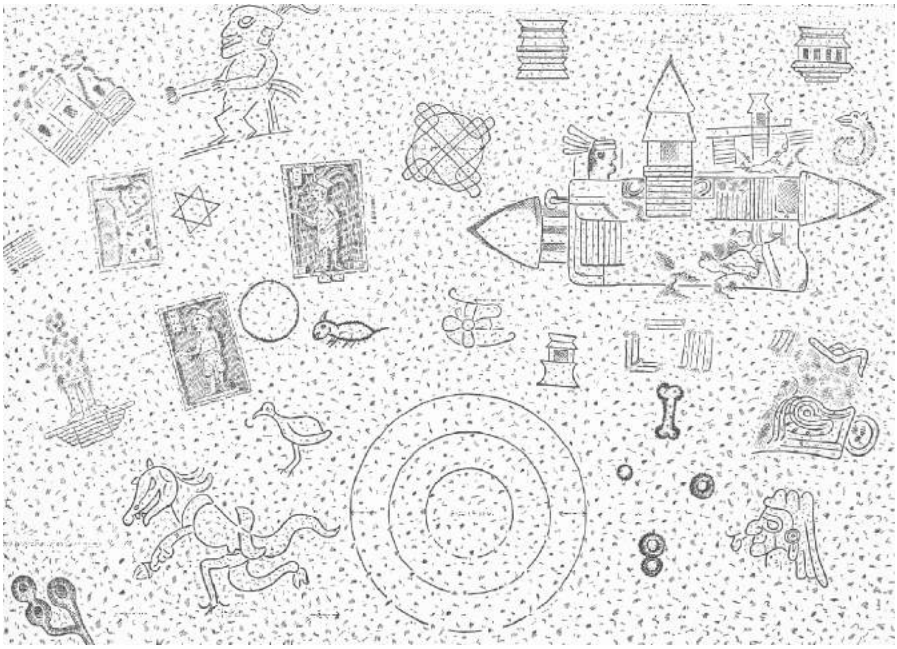

Figure 4.28. Carvings on the limestone slab at Planchón de las Figuras on the shore of the Lacantun River, Chiapas, Mexico (after Maler 1903:205, fig. 67).

Planchón de las Figuras (Wide Slab of the Figures) represents a major monolithic rock art site, likely a Maya pilgrimage shrine, on the bank of the Lacantun River in lowland Chiapas. A great variety of carved designs can be seen on this limestone shelf when the river is low (fig. 4.28). Maya travelers visited this rock when the carvings were exposed, and they may have performed rituals to increase the flow of water during the dry season. It is possible that the river is named after this ritual limestone slab since Lakam Tun is a Mayan term for "wide stone." Stuart (2011:257) also identified a site called Lakamtun in a text on a monument at El Palma, which is near Planchón de las Figuras. The Planchón de las Figuras rock has incised drawings of ancient Maya buildings, towns, monuments, people, animals, patolli game grids, and geometric figures (Maler 1903:205; Pincemin Deliberos 1999:144–48, 159). The depictions of monuments, buildings, and towns may date to the Classic period or shortly thereafter. However, other designs, such as animals, human figures, and geometric patterns, may have been made before or after this period. The limestone shelf functioned as a ritual locale for Maya pilgrims.

Carved designs on the rock depicting human legs walking reinforce this interpretation (Pincemin Deliberos 1999:128).

In relation to the Lacandon Maya, I discovered fragments of two Lacandon incense burners on a limestone outcrop near Lake Mangal in southwest Petén (Palka 2005b:147–48). This lake is adjacent to the Pasión River and the San Juan Acul lakes. Lacandon people likely performed ceremonies near these rocks at the lake, or they deposited their used incense burners at this shrine during a god pot renewal ceremony. The finds were adjacent to a Lacandon habitation site that dates from the mid- to late nineteenth century (Palka 2005b:146). One incensario exhibits carved vertical lines under the modeled head on its rim, which represent the clothing of a male deity (see fig. 4.23), as well as carved "sun" symbols with lines radiating out of circles. Spikes protrude from the exterior of the vessel, as seen on ancient Maya incense burners. The god represented by this ceramic incense burner may be Hachakyum, a principal Lacandon deity associated with the sun, sky, and creation (McGee 1990, 2005).

While this chapter focused on earth and sky gods and the places to contact them, the next chapter looks at ritual landscapes, including lakes, springs, rivers, and islands, that have been important for Maya religious beliefs regarding fertility, renewal, rebirth, and feminine generative powers. As we will see, the latter types of ritual landscapes are also important for beliefs and ceremonies regarding community identity, and they are strongly associated with a people's origins, territory, and the maintenance of cosmic balance.

CHAPTER FIVE

Creation and the Moon Goddess

Maya Islands and Ritual Waters

> The [Ch'orti' Maya] elders believe that the Serpent or *Noh Chih Chan*, which is at the bottom of the spring, is the guardian of water. Its permanent presence there is indispensable; otherwise the spring would dry up. Noh Chih Chan is pictured as a gigantic feathered dragon with four horns, whose tail exhibits enormous rattles . . . the elder, through his magical arts, awakens it when he names it, offering it at the same time blood and the remains of birds and *chilate*.
>
> —Raphael Girard, *People of the Chan*, 1995, 115

My interest in Maya ritual landscapes and pilgrimage, specifically with regard to lakes and islands, began while I was perusing the photographs of Marvin Vann at the Albion College library. In the early 1970s, Vann documented Lacandon Maya ritual journeys to Lake Petha, Chiapas (also Lake Guineo and Itsanok'uh; *pet ha'* is a generic Lacandon term for lake or "round water"; Cook 2004). Lacandon male religious specialists from Naha walked several hours to the lake to visit shrines at high cliffs, caves, Maya ruins, and islands (see fig. 3.13). Their ancestors concentrated their settlements at Lake Petha before the area was populated by the Tzeltal Maya in the mid-twentieth century (Maler 1901). What is particularly interesting is that the Lacandon Maya from Naha could have chosen a number of lakes with cliffs, ruins, and caves for their pilgrimage ceremonies. Nonetheless, they returned to Lake Petha because the shrines of their ancestors were found on this large, ritually significant lake. The Lacandon also believed that the ritual sites were associated with important gods, whom they visited during a time of great economic and demographic change in lowland

Chiapas during the mid-twentieth century. I argue that the Lacandon Maya carried out pilgrimages to this lake to symbolically mark it as ancestral territory, as well as to carry out rituals for ancestral deities to obtain cosmic balance in a period of tremendous upheaval.

This chapter treats bodies of water in the Southern Maya Region, mainly springs and lakes, as significant Maya ritual landscapes (see fig. 1.9). We will examine the nature of Maya pilgrimage and ritual at these places. While some research has been carried out on Maya rituals at springs, cenotes, and lakes, fewer investigations have focused on islands as Maya ritual landscapes, even though it is well known that Cozumel was an important pilgrimage center. I discuss islands along with ritual bodies of water because they are found together. Also, they both are associated with creation, renewal, health, and feminine spiritual forces. The following section covers the ethnographic and archaeological information on bodies of water and islands as important Maya ritual landscapes over the last two millennia.

THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF MAYA WATER RITUALS

Water ceremonies are central to Maya cultures in the study region (fig. 5.1). To begin with, springs and lakes are important ritual landscapes for modern Tzeltal Mayas in Chiapas for these geographical features provide means for communication with the owners of the mountains (Pitarch Ramón 1996:49). The Tzeltal Maya celebrate the beginning of the rainy season at these ritual places every year, including communication with the "Guardian of the River" or Yabahen (Blom and La Farge 1926:368). Like other ritual landscapes covered in this book, sources of water can be dangerous places for humans for the surface of water attracts people's soul essences, which can be lost here. In order to recuperate a soul and heal a person, then, Tzeltal religious specialists excavate a hole near a spring in which to leave offerings to placate the owners of the mountains (Pitarch Ramón 1996:49–50). These offerings consist of soft drinks, cigarettes, candles, and blood from the ritual specialist performing the ceremony. This person also inters a piece of paper with the name of the sick person written on it, which shows the power of writing and transmitting messages in Tzeltal Maya ritual. Springs, like caves and other unique places located away from settlements, are areas where the Tzeltal people see and communicate with animal spirits (Pitarch Ramón 1996:58). The Tzeltal Maya believe that the soul essences residing in their hearts are

their animal spirits (*lab*), and if they are associated with water they take the form of snakes (Pitarch Ramón 1996:59). These snake essences live in deep pools (*k'ib'al lukum* or *poza de culebras*), especially lakes that have whirlpools, or they reside in pools in rivers (Pitarch Ramón 1996:60), which reflects a common Mesoamerican belief. One of these snakes takes the form of a horned serpent called Tzuluchan. This deity is related to the water- and cloud-dwelling feathered serpent Cuchulchan (Kukulcan-Quetzalcoatl) of the historic Tzeltal and Tzotzil Maya (Calnek 1988:46).

Water holes are important in the religion and social organization of the Tzotzil Maya community of Zinacantan (Vogt 1993:25), which illustrates the connection between Maya identity, territory, and ritual landscape. Tzotzil lineages (*sna*) are associated with specific waterholes (*vo'*), and people from these lineages participate in rituals in shrines at these places. Offerings of candles, food, and alcohol are left at shrines near the water holes for deities to consume, rather than being tossed into the pool (Vogt 1993:99–111). The lineages maintain separate shrines for ancestral deities on mountains and in caves for the earth lord. Water holes, mountains, and caves are all visited during pilgrimages to undertake lineage rituals (Calnek 1988). These rituals reinforce social structure through participants' roles in the ceremonies, delineate water usufruct by lineage, and demarcate physical boundaries between social groups (Vogt 1993:109–11). Water holes are ritually significant for the Tzotzil Maya because they are openings in the earth from which freshwater flows. Water from springs is all-important for Tzotzil Mayas' domestic purposes, and it becomes scarce during the dry season. They also use water from water holes in ritual bathing during curing ceremonies (Vogt 1993:72). Tzotzil people recount myths about their water holes, such as how they discovered them. The water holes have male or female attributes, depending on the origins of the water, its perceived qualities, and the mythologies associated with these places (Vogt 1993:63–64). The Tzotzil communicate with ancestral and earth deities at water hole shrines because water holes are passages to the house of the earth lord, and they are bathing places for ancestral gods living in adjacent mountains (Vogt 1993:63). The earth lord, who owns the water, allows people to draw water from the opening if they leave offerings (Vogt 1993:108). Ceremonies at water holes also help bring the rains (Vogt 1993:114).

Ritual springs are central locales for water and fertility rites in other parts of the Southern Maya Region. The Ch'ol Maya from Tila complete their obligations to and ask favors of their nature and earth deity ("la tierra, madre de

Figure 5.1. A contemporary highland Guatemala Maya shrine with a large stone standing at the edge of a spring (after Blom and La Farge 1926:fig. 368).

todos") by making offerings and praying at a spring or cave (Pérez Chacón 1993:221). They work the mother earth and plant according to lunar cycles, thus offerings have to be given to obtain the blessings of spiritual forces for rain, good harvests, and the health of people and animals. Ch'ol religious specialists, mostly men, are in charge of providing offerings and prayers to gods at springs, rivers, caves, mountains, and crosses so that the entire community benefits from their gifts of rain, health, and protection (Pérez Chacón

1993:226). When they need help from spiritual forces for sick patients, Ch'ol curers visit a stream or a mountain to request that these forces return the sick person's lost soul and not retain it since no one has stolen the deities' property (Pérez Chacón 1993:289–90).

The Ch'orti' Maya in Guatemala also carry out myriad rituals at important pools. Their term for spring or pool is *ut ha'*, which means "eye [opening] of water" (Houston 2010:73). This term refers to these geographical features as portals to spiritual realms, in addition to connecting them with eyes and seeing. One pool, called El Oregano, has deep, tranquil blue water that lies at a bend in a river at the edge of a sheer cliff (Girard 1995:25–30). This pool is likened by Ch'orti' religious specialists to a "cosmic basin" resting near one of the four pillars of the world, and it holds inexhaustible amounts of water. Clouds transport this water and pour it over the earth in the form of rain. Similarly, the Yucatec Maya believe that rain gods raise water from deep cenotes into the sky, then make it come down as fertilizing rain (Girard 1995:25). Additionally, pools and ponds are where the Ch'orti' contact forces of nature (masters of abundance, masters of offerings) during rituals for rain, plentiful food, and good health for everyone in the community (Girard 1995:31). They also believe that dead members of the community work with the spiritual forces to obtain these things. In one ceremony, Ch'orti' religious specialists gave offerings to gods (four powerful ones, four miraculous ones) of the four creations, including food and *chilate* (a drink made from cacao, maize, chile, and spices), at the four pillars of the east and west at El Oregano pool during a pilgrimage for a new-year ceremony (Girard 1995:26–32).

Ch'orti' Maya elders constructed scaffolding over another ritual spring and built a permanent temple there for native rites. They also cast chilate into ritual springs, as well as parts of sacrificial turkeys, as offerings to the deities who live there (Girard 1995:200, 250, 255). During a Ch'orti' ritual to bring the rains and encourage the generation of plants, elders set up crosses at a ritual spring. This spring is located in a pass between cliffs and is the origin of a river that brings water to Maya communities in the valley of Quetzaltepeque (Girard 1995:103–15). Noh Chih Chan, a gigantic feathered serpent with horns and a tail with large drumlike rattles that make lots of noise, lives at the bottom of the spring, where it guards water. The serpent also resides in the hill and large boulders behind the spring called Chan Witz or "Serpent Mountain." This serpent is the "master of the water" and together with a feminine crocodilian deity produces fish and water. The Ch'orti' Maya believe this great serpent can bring rain by coiling in bodies of water and

undulating through the clouds (Houston 2010:72). If the serpent did not release water, then there would be no rain or food.

Before the rituals at this spring, elder Ch'orti' women prepare special meals in their settlements (Girard 1995:105–17). During the evening, a large number of Ch'orti' men participate in a pilgrimage to this sacred water hole. Danger lurks at this place for portals to the underworld open in the cliffs nearby. Ch'orti' male elders place candles and incense burners near crosses they erect there and in a hole dug in the ground that symbolizes the navel of the universe and the passage to the underworld. The Ch'orti' Maya believe that smoke from the incense, and also from the cigars they smoke during the ritual, becomes clouds that bring rain. Abundant offerings of food, cigars, chilate, brandy, and sacrificial turkeys are given to the ritual participants and the gods, especially the serpent in the spring. Virgin water is then taken from the spring and brought back to the church to be used by spiritual forces to bring rain. Ch'orti' Mayas make pilgrimages to the churches and temples in neighboring Ch'orti' towns to join in the rites (Girard 1995:123). Ch'orti' Maya pilgrimages to churches and ritual springs also link celestial movements with rain and renewal. During new-year ceremonies, Ch'orti' Maya religious leaders and their assistants leave the churches in their communities and walk to distant destinations to the west, mimicking the travels of the sun (Girard 1995:23). They carry their food and ceremonial items, and the leader of the pilgrimage heads quickly down the trails just like the first new sun leads the rest of the suns that follow throughout the year. The first four people who follow him are the four year bearers of the new year. A young woman lags behind them, just as the feminine moon follows the masculine sun (Girard 1995:24). The first stop on the pilgrimage is a ritually significant pool near a cliff. The pilgrims carry out the necessary rites for rain and fertility and then eat ceremonial meals.

At specific times of the year, Ch'orti' pilgrims walk to Esquipulas and the colonial period cathedral housing the image of the Black Christ for rituals for rain and good harvests. They also travel to shop in local markets (Kendall 1991:141; fig. 5.2). Esquipulas is located near therapeutic thermal springs and ritual hills, rivers, and caves (Bond 2010:161; Borhegyi 1954:387–89; Brady 1993), and it was founded along a pilgrimage route from the ancient Maya site of Copán, Honduras (Hunter and de Kleine 1984:157). The Ch'orti' Maya associate the Esquipulas shrine with water (Tedlock 2010:16). They state that a lake with a serpent owner is found under the shrine, and people must bathe in the purifying waters of a nearby stream before entering the sanctuary

Figure 5.2. Cathedral and pilgrimage shrine at Esquipulas, Guatemala.

(Fought 1972:451–53). Esquipulas is located to the southeast of Ch'orti' communities; thus, it is conceptually associated with the eastern direction, the rising sun (Girard 1995:36), and the rejuvenating rains, like other eastern Maya shrines, such as Cozumel. Before the rainy season commences, Ch'orti' Maya male elders pilgrimage to Esquipulas to "fetch the winter" (*invierno* or "rain"; Girard 1995:199–200). The elders take with them balls of copal incense (*sas tun*) and place them at the foot of the cross in the cathedral while asking the local spiritual forces for rain. Here, Ch'orti' curers obtain small kaolin clay cakes (*pan del Señor* [Black Christ]; Kendall 1991:145) blessed by the Esquipulas priests that contain an image of the Virgin Mary, the patroness of childbirth (Wisdom 1940:360; see fig. 2.4). Women consume the cakes with water to control the flow of menstrual blood and relieve the pains of childbirth. The cakes also provide minerals for the body and alleviate stomach ills (Hunter and de Kleine 1984). Ch'orti' Maya pilgrims return from Esquipulas to their communities with water from springs (Tedlock 2010:17) and fresh leaves and green walking staffs for rituals at their church altars (Girard 1995:200). The green vegetation represents the renewal of plants following Ch'orti' Maya rain-making pilgrimage rituals.

According to Ch'orti' Maya beliefs, their pilgrimages to springs and other ritual landscapes mimic the journeys of the gods from the heavens to the earth and then back again (Girard 1995:240). Gods make their pilgrimages with the aid of conceptual pyramids, steps, or terraces that lead from the sky to the earth. This belief brings to mind the presence of steps and terraces and the importance of movement in ancient Maya ritual places and pilgrimage sites around the world. The steps on the imaginary pyramid unite the two cosmic planes, and each step is believed to be like a protective encirclement. The Ch'orti' Maya also believe that dead people make pilgrimages through ritual landscapes where they scale a ladder, or stairway, to the house of the sun among the stars in the sky (Girard 1995:339–42). Along the way, the soul energies of deceased pilgrims pass to the Ch'orti' underworld through the western portal and descend along gloomy cliffs and mountains. The dead cross treacherous rivers and pass through dangerous caves with water—which recalls Tlalocan, the place of water and the dead (López Austin 1997)—before they reach their destination. The concept among the ancient Maya of the dead traveling along a road or body of water during a final pilgrimage is reflected in their euphemisms for death, *och bih* ("entered the road" or "road entering") and *och ha'* (entered the water) in hieroglyphic inscriptions. This trip is symbolized by the Hero Twins' descent into the ancient Maya watery underworld to face the trials of the deities who reside there (Girard 1995:340–41).

In the lowlands of Chiapas, Blom and Duby (1955:419, 435) witnessed Lacandon Maya rites in water. During a gathering of Lacandon men near Lake Miramar, Chiapas, one man complained of the low quality of maize in his fields. Eventually, the men proceeded to the Jatate River adjacent to the settlement, took off their clothes, and entered the calm waters. They provided offerings of food and maize gruel, or *pozol*, in a gourd to the sun (Duby Blom 1999:54, 56). One man tossed pozol into the water toward the east before he took a drink. This pozol was for the sun to drink, so that the Lacandon people would receive a bountiful harvest (Blom and Duby 1955:435). We witnessed a similar reenactment of a ritual at a waterfall in a stream near the ruins of Palenque (fig. 5.3). The Lacandon participants placed their offering bowls and incense burners on leaves on the banks of the stream, and they stood in the water while chanting prayers to their gods. Lacandon Mayas have stated that ritual lakes and rivers near caves and cliffs (the "houses of the gods") are actually cornfields of the gods (Boremanse 1998b:202). These beliefs connect the fertility of water with cornfields and sustenance. Other

Figure 5.3. Lacandon ritual near a small waterfall in a stream at the ruins of Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico.

Lacandon Mayas believe that certain deities live in bodies of water. One god called Xoc, or Sirena (Siren/Mermaid), has features of a woman, a fish, and a crocodile and lives in lakes and rivers. This goddess creates fish (Boremanse 1984:230), and she tries to capture men and take them into the water to live with her. Nahuat (Nawat), who is characterized by Lacandon people as being ugly and possibly is a manifestation of the Aztec god Nanahuatzin, a god of creation and renewal, lives in Lake Mensabak (Soustelle 1961:43). Additionally, the Lacandon Maya believe that the god Itsanok'uh, who is associated with crocodiles and water, lives on an island in Lake Petha (Soustelle 1961). Lacandon people from Mensabak state that Subi (or Subin), a dragonlike entity with many snake-like appendages, lives in lakes and preys on men and women arriving at the water's edge.

Ritually important bodies of water that are the homes of the gods and portals to the otherworld are viewed as dangerous places by the Lacandon Maya. They avoid, for example, Lake Miramar in Chiapas, which is called the "sacred lake of the Lacandon." This lake has been supernaturally charged ever since conquistadores attacked its island center (Lakamtun) and killed many people (Duby 1955:33). Lacandon men recalled that at this lake, which they call Chan K'ak' Na ("Small House of K'ak'," a god of disease, death, fire, and war who can bring destruction by water; Petryshyn 2005; Villa Rojas

1995:333), many historic Maya ("*otro caribe*/previous Lacandon") died from storms, rains, and rising waters, in addition to guns that shot lightning (Petersen 1952:185–86). They believed that if they visited the ruins on the island of Lakamtun, perhaps the home of K'ak', they, too, would die.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF MAYA RITUAL WATERS

In Maya civilization water was a vital resource, for the rains come only during certain times of the year, resulting in annual drought. Although water can be found in lakes, rivers, ponds, and swamps throughout the Maya area, crops and trees have to be nourished, and the bodies of water grow from the rains. Because of the marked wet-dry seasons and the need for water in this agricultural society, water figured prominently in ancient Maya art, architecture, and culture (Finamore and Houston 2010; Lucero and Fash 2006). For example, Mayas at the ancient site of Calakmul in Campeche created a vast artificial waterscape by digging out a large square lagoon near the site core. This reservoir had an important place-name, Chiik Nahb, and was possibly the locus of Maya ceremonies related to mythological events at primordial oceans or lakes (Miller and O'Neil 2010:30). A stone panel from the site of Cancuen, Petén, shows Maya nobles meeting in a ritual space delineated by a four-lobed symbol for a body of water, often viewed as portals to other realms (Demarest et al. 2007; Finamore and Houston 2010:86–87). This symbol repeats in the panel text with an infixed water hieroglyph, which reads as *pan ha'*, "cavity of water" (Finamore and Houston 2010:87). Although this sign could refer to a watery cave, it may also refer to a watery plaza or a body of water like a lake, pond, or aguada.

The inscriptions of Palenque demonstrate the importance of water for marking ritual places and social identity in ancient Maya civilization. At Palenque, symbols for water, *k'an nahb*, sometimes glossed as "precious sea" (Stuart and Stuart 2008:200), generally grace the lower edges of sculpture near the feet of standing Maya elites. The signs often include a water lily (Houston 2010:74), connoting freshwater lakes rather than the sea. The term *nahb*, or "standing water or sea," commonly occurs in royal titles at Palenque (Stuart and Stuart 2008:115). This reference to water may indicate the connections between Maya rulers at the site and the primordial lake or sea where humans, animals, and maize were created by gods. Also, the place-name associated with the physical location of Palenque, deciphered as Lakam Ha' or "Wide Water(s),"

Figure 5.4. Flock of cormorants, Lake Catazaja, Palenque region, Chiapas, Mexico.

indicates the importance of large bodies of water for the Palenque dynasty (Stuart 2010:42), and the Otolum River, which runs through the site, forms wide pools after it passes the ceremonial center (Stuart 2010:42).

I suggest that toponyms representing standing water in Palenque texts do not refer only to pools in the Otolum River. Instead, a body of water cited as the place of rebirth and cosmological connections is more likely Lake Catazaja (fig. 5.4). This very large lake—a true Lakam Ha'—is a short distance directly north of Palenque (see map in Rands 2007:26; see fig. 1.9). In the past, this lake was fed to its maximum extent of several kilometers by the Usumacinta River, which floods this area in the rainy season. Catazaja was the primary port for boats heading to the Campeche coast in the colonial period and most likely functioned similarly for the Maya at Palenque, which underscores its additional role in economics and politics. Locals state that the name *Catazaja* means "Place Where the Water Comes and Goes" or "Valley That Holds Water" in Ch'ol Mayan. The effects of the arrival of life-giving water to the lake are pronounced. Trees and plants blossom, and birds flock there to nest on islands. The expanding lake may have been visited by the Palenque Maya and seen as a place of rebirth and cosmological origins. I visited the lake in 2011 and witnessed water from the Usumacinta River rushing in and many thousands of fledgling birds of various species

covering the islands. Countless birds flew over the lake, including cranes, herons, and cormorants. Cormorants are prominent in the costumes of Maya rulers at Palenque, and their name in Mayan languages, *mat* or *mach*, may be connected to the sacred place of Matawil, where deities were born. Some Palenque rulers used the word *Mat* in their names, and this sign appears in examples of the Palenque emblem glyph (Stuart 2005:21–22), which represents the local polity and noble lineage. While cormorants inhabit local rivers, they are the main denizens of Lake Catazaja. Blue herons, another bird abundant at Catazaja, appear in Palenque inscriptions with fish in their beaks (Stuart 2005:37). Manatees, crocodiles, frogs, and fish also abound at this lake and mate during the rainy season as well. These animals figure prominently in the art and hieroglyphs of Palenque as well.

In Petén, the Itzaj Maya living at Lake Peten Itza are perhaps the most well known of the Maya groups in the southern Maya lowlands who performed rituals related to bodies of water. Most of the insights on these rites come from archaeology. However, the information that exists on historic Itzaj Maya ritual landscapes is also tantalizing. For instance, the Itzaj Maya, who lived in Yucatán before migrating to Petén, threw offerings and sacrificial victims into the sacred cenote at Chichen Itza in exchange for rain and prognostications (Caso Barrera and Aliphat Fernández 2002:721). Itzaj Maya religious specialists threw offerings of ceramics and other artifacts into Lake Peten Itza for similar reasons, and these offerings have been recovered by divers (Borhegyi 1963). The divers found ceramic vessels that had been thrown in near an artificial ramp of rocks in a shallow part of the lake. The vessels dated from the Preclassic period to Spanish contact (Andrews and Corletta 1995:105). Many vessels were Postclassic incense burners and effigy vessels, which suggests that they were offerings to rain gods, as seen in other underwater contexts in the Maya area (Andrews and Corletta 1995:105). A Postclassic incised deer bone that was recovered may represent an offering that Itzaj Mayas made to water deities in the lake (fig. 5.5). The bone depicts an undulating, feathered sky and water serpent that resembles serpent iconography at Chichen Itza and Lake Mensabak (see following) over a sky band with water and flower designs (Stone 1976:168).

At Lake Mensabak, we discovered archaeological evidence of water rituals. These rites apparently focused on water's life-giving properties, the fertility of the earth and humans, in addition to deities residing in the lake. It is interesting to note that we recovered ceramic figurines on the lakeshore after the water receded during the dry season (fig. 5.6). They are solid,

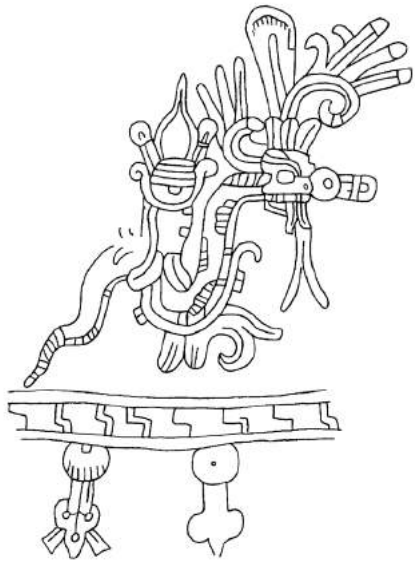

Figure 5.5. Postclassic Maya carved bone with incised feathered sky/water serpent from Lake Peten Itza, Petén, Guatemala (after Stone 1976:168).

individually made figurines that show women, or gods with feminine attributes, with stripes on their faces and bodies and sometimes ear plugs. These stripes more than likely represent painted designs, as described in historic documents from the region. Historic Maya people at Nohha near Mensabak, or possibly just men ("los indios"; Chávez Gómez 2000:51; López de Cogolludo 1957:699), painted or tattooed stripes on their bodies and wore ear and nose plugs and feathers in their hair. Few excavations at Mensabak have recovered examples of these figurines (Palka and Sánchez Balderas 2012). Thus, they appear to be associated with water rituals in the lake, where the Maya placed the female figurines as votive offerings for gods related to fertility, renewal, and the regenerative powers of water. Green obsidian blades have also been found around the lakeshore and may be associated with water rituals as well. Obsidian is associated with water generally in Mesoamerica, especially green obsidian.

The site of Kuyak at Mensabak includes a ritual hill on the lakeshore that was modified by the Maya (fig. 5.7). They leveled the summit and constructed a long narrow pathway flanked by benches or platforms. This promenade leads toward the edge of a cliff overlooking the lake. More than likely, the Maya carried out rituals on the summit of this hill and then dropped offerings into the lake. Since archaeologists recovered ceramic plates deposited by

Figure 5.6. Late Postclassic to historic Maya ceramic female figurines from Lake Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico; not to scale.

the Maya in Lake Miramar (Rivero Torres 1992), we expected to find similar offerings at Mensabak. When divers explored the lake bed near the cliff at Kuyak, however, no offerings were visible in the thick sediment. This site was ceremonial in nature for no domestic architecture is present. More than likely it was a lakeside pilgrimage shrine, like the cliff and cave at Tzibana and Mirador Mountain (see chapter 6). The ritual focus of Kuyak is further clarified by the presence of a ceremonial cave containing many ceramic sherds at the base of the hill. An altar platform also rests on the slope of the hill above the vertical cave entrance. Additionally, the site is protected by two parallel defensive walls where the peninsula on which the site is found begins as well as a defensive moat on its southwest side. Maya pilgrims arrived at the site and performed ceremonies in the cave before ascending the hill to throw objects in the lake.

In 2010 an intriguing carving appeared below painted designs on the Tzibana cliff at Mensabak when the lake level dropped more than twelve meters (fig. 5.8). This monumental carved design depicts an undulating feathered serpent that measures about seven meters long and two meters wide. Postclassic Mayas visiting the cliff shrine when the lake was dry carved the snake instead of painting it, knowing that it would be submerged and the

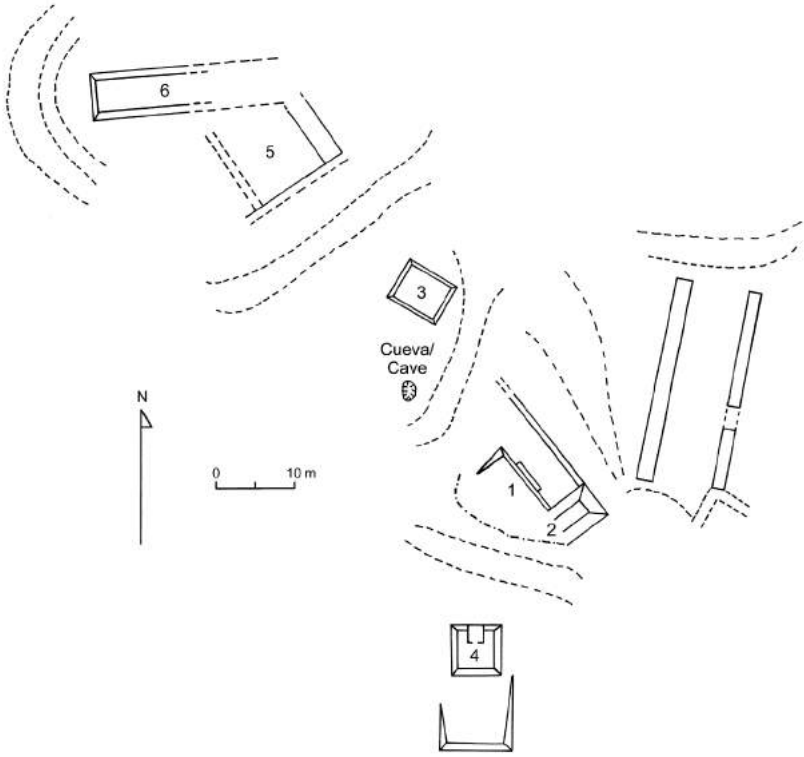

Figure 5.7. Plan of the ritual cave and cliff site of Kuyak (Kuhiyaak'), Lake Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico. Note the defensive walls near the mainland (right) and procession way (Str. 6) near a lakeside cliff (map by Rebecca Deeb and Nam Kim).

paint destroyed when the rains returned (fig. 5.9). The Maya likely performed ceremonies near this carving, which depicts the cloud, sky, and rain serpent called Quetzalcoatl in Aztec Nahuatl or K'uk'ulkan (Quetzal-Feathered Serpent) by Yucatec-speaking Mayas, including the Lacandon. When the design reappeared, it may have been likened to springtime and the beginning of the rainy season, when snakes appear on the surface of the ground. However, the design was more likely carved and worshiped during a drought, perhaps a particularly bad one in the region at the end of the Postclassic period (Folan and Gunn 2007; Vargas Pacheco 2002), when rituals would have been undertaken to bring back the rains to refill the lake. The design probably dates to Late Postclassic or perhaps protohistoric times when

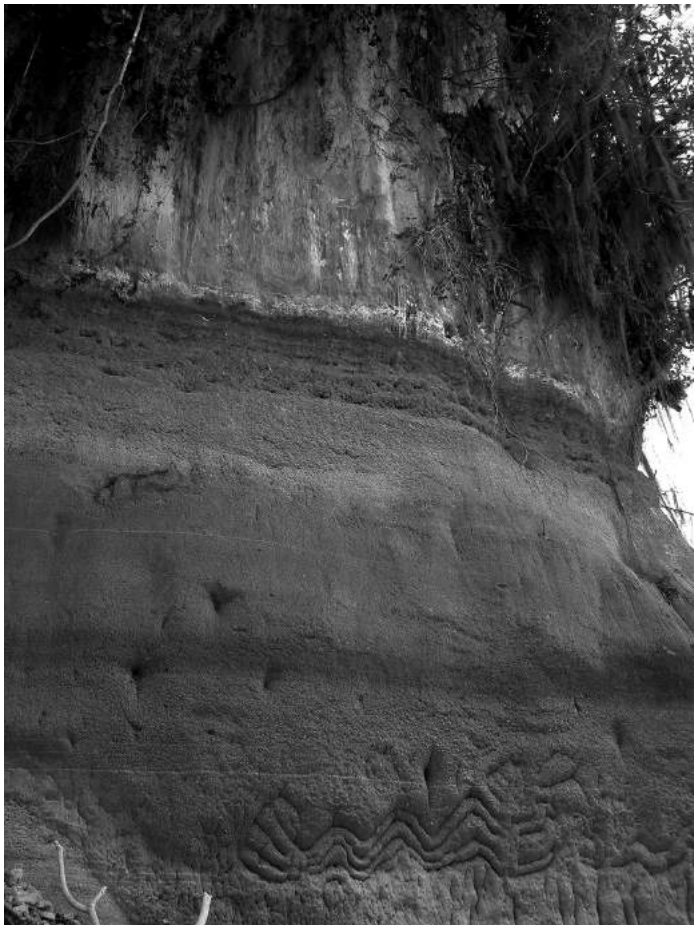

Figure 5.8. Monumental carved feathered serpent below the rock paintings and waterline at the Tzibana ritual cliff, Lake Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico.

feathered serpent imagery was common in Mesoamerica. The shrines at Lake Mensabak and nearby habitation sites, including Tzibana, only date to the Late Preclassic and Late Postclassic periods, supporting a Late Postclassic date for the serpent. Divers did not see artifacts in the thick sediment at the base of the cliff that would help date the creation and ceremonial utilization of the carving.

It is not surprising that giant feathered serpent imagery occurs on the sacred cliff of Tzibana and that it is found underwater because, as discussed

Figure 5.9. The Tzibana ritual cliff with the carved feathered serpent and rock paintings, Lake Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico (drawing by Frida Sánchez).

earlier, a great feathered serpent is associated with pools where it lives, rain making, and agricultural fertility in contemporary Maya religion (Batres Alfaro et al. 2009; Wisdom 1940), and Mayas in the past performed rituals at other cliffs with serpent imagery symbolizing bodies of water and rain. Monumental serpent images also occur in Postclassic rock art in the Ch'orti' Maya region in Guatemala and Honduras (fig. 5.10; Batres Alfaro et al. 2009:58, fig. 1). For example, a long red and black serpent with horns or feathers sticking out of its head that was discovered on an impressive cliff in eastern Guatemala was visited for rain rituals in the past. Additionally, large serpent designs were recorded on a cliff at Santa Elena de Izopo, Honduras, near a river (Stone 1976:133). Feathered serpent imagery and rituals for rain at pilgrimage shrines throughout Mesoamerica were also described in previous chapters, which underscores their importance.

Additional clues regarding the connection between serpents and water come from historic and ethnographic sources. The Ch'olti'-Lacandon Mayan name for the Usumacinta River is Icbolay, or possibly Ixbolay, which may refer to "a kind of snake" (Feldman 2000:240n9). The name of this river may be related to the Ch'orti' Maya concept of Chichan, a serpent deity who created valleys and rivers with its undulating body (Batres Alfaro et al. 2009; Wisdom 1940). For many Lacandon Mayas, the serpent K'uk'ulkan actually exists. They describe this animal as an immense serpent with large scales that lifts its headdress of feathers when agitated (Bruce 1968:135). The Lacandon Maya at Lake Mensabak claim to have seen a great serpent

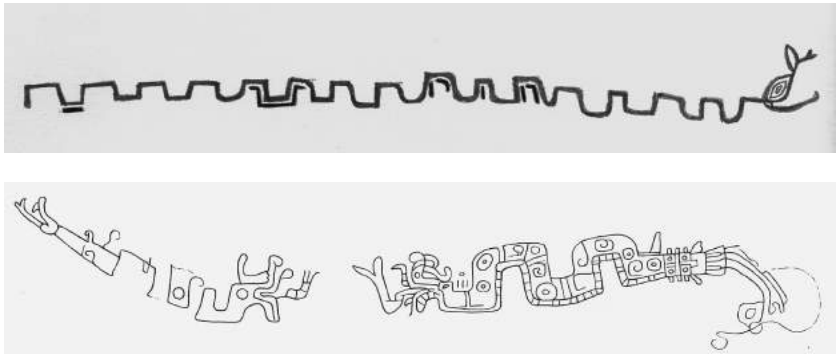

Figure 5.10. Red and black feathered serpent at a cliff and rock art shrine near Chiquimula, Guatemala (top; drawing by Paulina Makuch after Batres Alfaro et al. 2009:58) and carved feathered serpents at a cliff shrine at Santa Elena de Izopo, Honduras (bottom); drawing by Paulina Makuch after Stone 1976:133; not to scale).

swimming on the surface of the water. This creature, likely related to the water entity Subi discussed earlier, causes much fear because it is said to devour people. One of these serpents with multiple heads lives in Lake Miramar, while others live in the sky (Bruce 1968:135–36; Tozzer 1907:96). Feathers on the serpent fan the clouds and sky, producing thunder, wind, and rain. The Yucatec Maya also believe that large serpents roaming on the earth and flying through the air actually live in caves, ponds, and cenotes, where their paths or prints can be seen (Evia Cervantes 2007:60–63, 130, 157; see fig. 4.13). These serpents are dangerous since they can hurt, sicken, or kill animals and humans. The huge serpents have rattlesnakes' tails and heads the size of horses' heads, complete with manes like fine corn silk (*tsu*; Evia Cervantes 2007:129, 147–48, 159). They also sprout wings and tail feathers and fly into the clouds. By believing in these serpents and their abodes, Maya people reinforce their indigenous ritual practices and identity (Evia Cervantes 2007:197). The Yucatec Maya associate these serpents, called *tsukan* (mane serpent) and *kukulkan* (quetzal feather serpent), with water, the fertility of the earth, and world creation (Evia Cervantes 2007:63, 123, 194). Since snakes live in the ground, Maya people believe that they guard the sources of water and the fertility of the earth. However, these places with snakes and spiritual forces are dangerous for humans. The connection between snakes, water, earth, fertility, and danger in Mesoamerica more than likely was derived from observations that snakes emerge from their

dens in the earth during the onset of the rainy season, a time of fertility and renewal (Furst 2005).

Underwater Archaeology and Maya Pilgrimage to Lakes

Maya ritual lakes, like cenotes and springs, have drawn pilgrims over a long period (see fig. 3.24). For example, numerous offerings by Maya pilgrims of whole effigy ceramic vessels, incense burners, human bones, jade artifacts, and stone sculptures dating from Preclassic to Postclassic times were recovered by divers in Lake Amatitlan in the Guatemalan highlands (Andrews and Corletta 1995:107–8; Borhegyi 1967, 1974; Mata Amado 1999, 2011). This lake, located near the major Maya site of Kaminaljuyu, is surrounded by volcanoes, mountains, cliffs, and springs, some of which have hot water. Sites dating to different periods found along the lakeshore consist of temples, plazas, and walkways (Borhegyi 1974:180), which is consistent with pilgrimage shrines everywhere (fig. 5.11). Rock art shrines with carved boulders and dense deposits of artifacts in the water are found near these sites (fig. 5.12; Carpio Rezzio and Morales 1999). Divers have discovered numerous ceramic vessels stacked on top of each other in groups of six or seven pieces (see fig. 5.12), indicating that the Maya placed offerings in the water when the lake was low, perhaps during a drought (Borhegyi 1967:377, 379). Other vessels were embedded upright in lava flows, indicating that worshipers set them in advancing lava near the lakeshore (Borhegyi 1967:379; see fig. 5.11). They also deposited a cluster of ceramic offerings, including spiked incense burners, in the lake near hot springs (Borhegyi 1967:374). Many of the artifacts were scattered in the middle of the lake by Mayas conducting ceremonies in boats. Ceramic pots contained offerings such as mercury, cinnabar, human skulls, and shattered jade ear spools (Borhegyi 1967:378). The imagery on the ceramics includes cacao plants, birds, jaguars, monkeys, snakes, and human skulls, in addition to gods such as Tlaloc (the rain, earth, and storm god), the jaguar god of the underworld, Xipe Totec (a god of fertility and renewal), and the death god (Mata Amado 2011). The predominance of jaguar features on incense burners suggests that they were offerings to Maya rain and water deities who often have jaguar attributes (Borhegyi 1967:379).

The several hundred ceramic offering vessels and incensarios (Mata Amado 2011:49), many mass-produced to be the same size and shape, recovered from Lake Amatitlan provide strong evidence for pilgrimage to this ritual lake and the sites and springs near its shores. Furthermore, miniature

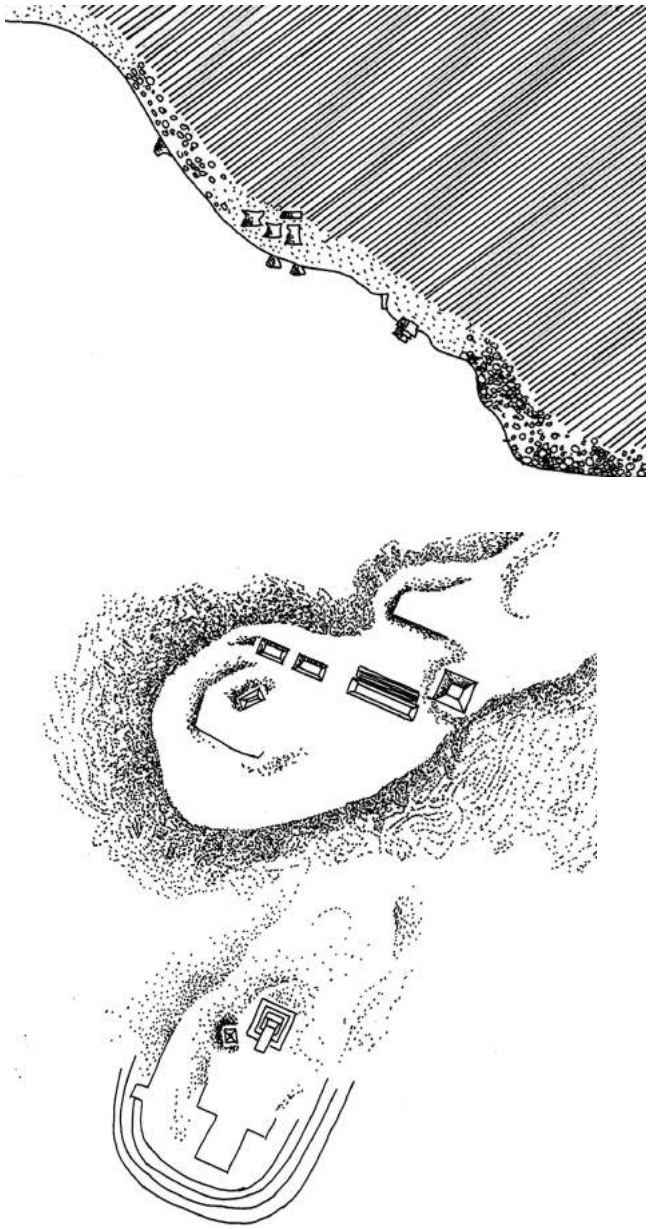

Figure 5.11. Ceramic vessels placed upright or stacked in a lava flow (top) and plan of ritual architecture (bottom), Contreras Alto and Los Jicaques, respectively, Lake Amatitlan, Guatemala (drawings by Paulina Makuch after Borhegyi 1974:180; not to scale).

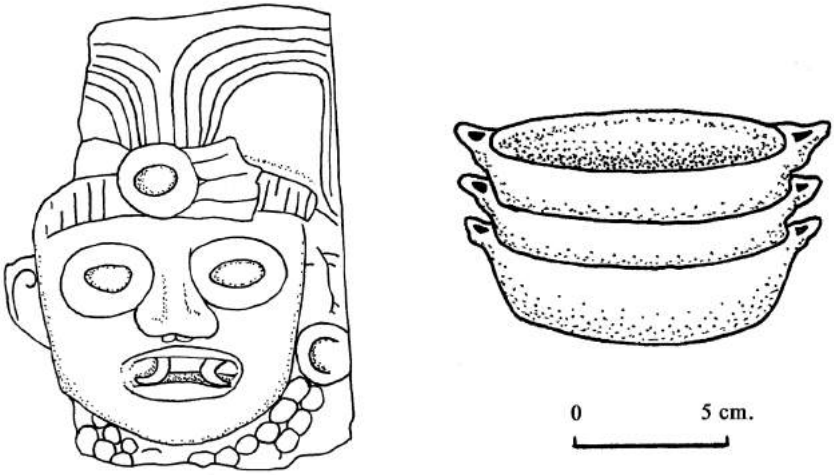

Figure 5.12. Pilgrim offerings from Lake Amatitlan, Guatemala: ceramic Tlaloc figure (after Mata Amado 2011:70) and stacked miniature ceramic vessels (incense pans or sartenes; after Mata Amado 2011:48; not to scale).

vessels brought by pilgrims were also common. The ceramics came from different parts of Guatemala, and they belong to various cultures and chronological periods, including artifacts from highland Mayas, local sites such as Kaminaljuyu, sites under the influence of Teotihuacan, and Cotzumalhuapa sites on the Pacific Coast (Andrews and Corletta 1995:108; Borhegyi 1967). Worshipers have come to Lake Amatitlan for over three thousand years, and the lake still attracts pilgrims who throw offerings into the waters (Borhegyi 1974:183; Straub 1991) and visit the thermal baths and geysers there for their therapeutic effects (Borhegyi 1974:178). Traditionally, pilgrims from Guatemala went to Lake Amatitlan for the Festival of the Cross, which melds Christian and ancient Maya rituals and beliefs (Borhegyi 1967:379–80; Straub 1991). The church at San Juan Amatitlan holds the wooden carving of the Santo Niño de Atocha, which, according to legend, replaced an ancient stone carving called Jefe Dios during an earthquake on a stormy night. This wooden carving supposedly has magical healing powers. Each year local people remove this wooden image and take it across the lake in a procession of decorated boats to the place where the image miraculously appeared. The pilgrims then hurl offerings of flowers and fruits into the lake to obtain health, agricultural fertility, and prosperity.

One ancient Maya site called Chinkultic (Cenote with Steps) is famous for

its ritual bodies of water (Navarrete 1984). Chinkultic rests on the interface between the Maya highlands and lowlands near the town of Comitan and Lake Miramar, Chiapas. The ceramics, stone monuments, hieroglyphic writing, and architecture at Chinkultic indicate that its inhabitants participated in different social and economic spheres of the southern Maya lowlands, Chiapas highlands, and Pacific Coast from Preclassic to Postclassic times (Ball 1980; Borhegyi 1968; Navarette 1984). The site has cenotes, large lakes, caves, cliffs, and mountains, which made Chinkultic an important Maya pilgrimage destination (fig. 5.13). The Blue Cenote is a deep sink hole with white limestone cliffs found near the acropolis, which was constructed at the top of a grand staircase leading to the leveled summit of a tall hill (figs. 5.14 and 5.15). The acropolis is flanked by another sink hole, the Hidden Cenote, and two adjacent lakes connected by a stream. The Maya initially built the acropolis in the Preclassic period and then constructed more ritual buildings in the Late Classic and Postclassic periods (Ball 1980). Mayas ascended the hill, which was modified with terraces and steps, to perform rituals in the temples and shrines in the acropolis (Borhegyi 1968). They then tossed objects into the Blue Cenote, where divers have recovered ceramics, human bone, jade beads, greenstone axes, obsidian, shells, and ceramic figurines (Ball 1980; Gallegos Ruiz 1976). Maya rain and water gods are common motifs on the ceramics. Archaeologists have also discovered ceramic vessels left as offerings under large rocks (Gallegos Ruiz 1976:111), and they have reported ceramic vessels with offerings in natural stone niches, all placed by Maya divers.

Rulers at Chinkultic adorned themselves and their carved monuments with rain god, or Tlaloc, imagery in addition to using water lilies in their headdresses (Navarrete 1984:figs. 12, 56, and 61). Rituals carried out at the cenotes and lakes at Chinkultic focused on controlling rain and water, hence, standing nobles shown on the monuments carry incense bags for these rituals (fig. 5.16). Many visiting nobles are also shown in the stone stelae. Another monument, a large carved monolith, shows curvy lines that may represent water below a footprint, which may be a jaguar's paw or a human foot (Ball 1980:fig. 55; Navarrete 1984:fig. 47). This monument may refer to a local place-name, or it may denote nobles' arrival to Chinkultic for water ceremonies.

Furthermore, ritual caves are found near ceremonial precincts and ritual waters at Chinkultic (fig. 5.17). A large cave on Lake Tepancuapan on the west side of the site contained Maya bones and skulls with artificial shaping (Blom

Figure 5.13. Acropolis flanked by cenotes, cliffs, and lakes, Chinkultic, Chiapas, Mexico. Note the raised area of the grand staircase leading to the hill summit with temples and shrines (photograph courtesy of the Ferguson-Royce Collection, Fine Arts Library, University of Texas–Austin; image number 10311367233).

1954:123–24; see fig. 4.14). Two other ritual caves with burials and artifacts were used in the Late Postclassic period (Navarrete and Martínez 1977:13–14). Since these caves are located in hard-to-reach places and filled with offerings and human bone, ancient Maya pilgrims must have conducted mortuary and ancestor rites there. Archaeologists investigated one intact ritual cave, Cueva de los Andasolos, which dates from the Classic to Postclassic periods (Navarrete and Martínez 1977). The cave contained altars with sculptures, some from speleothems, and ceramic effigy vessels with many artifacts inside. The majority of the artifacts are small offerings left by pilgrims, including carved stones, round stones, stone and ceramic figurines, and natural rocks. Human faces and effigies dominate the artifact assemblage, and one carved stone is in the shape of a foot (Navarrete and Martínez 1977:33–34, fig. 11, photo 35). The cave walls were also decorated with stylized human faces. Maya worshipers likely visited the cave to undertake ceremonies for earth lords, ancestors, and rain. The ancestors would mediate with spiritual forces on behalf of the living to acquire things that they needed.

Further insights on Maya pilgrimage to lakes can be gleaned from the archaeological record. At Lake Mendoza, a lake in southwest Petén, we

Figure 5.14. Acropolis and shrine, Chinkultic, Chiapas, Mexico. Note small Postclassic period shrines in front of a Classic period temple and Lake Tepancuapan at the bottom of the hill.

discovered evidence for past Maya water rituals (Palka et al. 2007). On one island we found a narrow terrace near the water's edge where the Late Postclassic Maya set incense burners in a row (figs. 5.18 and 5.19; Palka et al. 2007). When the water rises during the rainy season, this terrace is covered, and the water reaches the feet of or covers the incense burners. Thus, Maya worshipers made the terrace knowing that the incense burners would be close to the lake or underwater at certain times of the year. The incensarios had human effigies with modeled arms, legs, and clothing with copper bells attached. Many small copper bells of this type were recovered from Late Postclassic sites on the lakeshore at Lake Mensabak, which may have been used in pilgrimage rituals (fig. 5.20). As we have seen, copper bells are associated with other Maya pilgrimage sites. The incense burners at Lake Mendoza also have diagnostic Late Postclassic geometric and round eye motifs. The incensarios resemble effigy incense burners with anthropomorphic figures from the central Petén lakes region (Rice 2009) and the island of Topoxte (Hermes 2000). The vessels and the effigies on the Lake

Figure 5.15. Cliff, the Blue Cenote, lakes, and mountains as seen from the acropolis of Chinkultic, Chiapas, Mexico.

Mendoza incense burners were more crudely fashioned, however, and the manufacturing style of these vessels may indicate that they are a regional variation of Late Postclassic incense burners or date to more recent times. The Maya may have carried out rituals related to water and agricultural fertility on the terrace. We could not discern specific features on the anthropomorphic images on the incensarios or interpret whether their function was related to water, ancestors, or other divine beings. It is also not clear whether Late Postclassic to historic Maya lived at Lake Mendoza or made pilgrimages there. We recovered Late Postclassic Maya ceramics from the summits of islands and in caves around the lake, but no clear Postclassic habitation sites have been identified. Perhaps Maya pilgrims arrived at the lake to conduct ceremonies on the islands, terraces, and in the many caves. Hills on the islands at Lake Mendoza have terraces leading to their summits, which were leveled by the ancient Maya. Few low constructions are on the summits, which may indicate that they were shrines for Maya pilgrims and not habitation sites.

Figure 5.16. Stela illustrating a Maya ruler carrying a tasseled incense bag (right) and a visiting noble (lower left corner, smaller scale), Chinkultic, Chiapas, Mexico.

ISLANDS AND MAYA RITUALS

We have little information on the ritual importance of Maya islands from ethnographies, mainly because Mayas no longer live on islands or use them ceremonially. However, the significance of Maya ritual islands can be gleaned from mythology (see fig. 3.27). Islands are common in the geography of the Southern Maya Region, and they were utilized since the Preclassic period, which explains their prominence in Maya religion and histories. Islands can be found in large rivers, such as at El Cayo in the Usumacinta River, and in

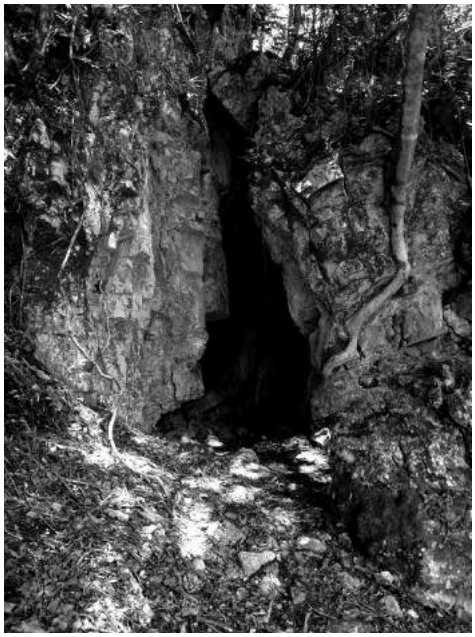

Figure 5.17. Ritual cave at the ruins of Chinkultic, Chiapas, Mexico.

lakes, including Lake Peten Itza and Lake Miramar. In Maya myths, the world began as an island in a primordial sea, and people descended from ancestors who originated on islands. For instance, the Tzotzil Maya state that "long ago, when the world was flooded . . . two people fled away; There was a large mountain, on its top, they were saved, you see, there they hid themselves until the water dried up" (Vogt 1969:308). This mountain summit protruding from the primordial sea was essentially an island in a mythological Maya ritual landscape.

Myths regarding islands are present in other contemporary Maya cultures in the study region. For instance, the world was often symbolized by the lowland Maya as a turtle, crocodile, or island floating in a large body of water. The ancestors of the Itzaj Maya (*nojoch winik*, "great/large people") surprised a crocodile in a place called P'ich Ayim (Penis of the Crocodile) near the shore of Lake Peten Itza (Atran et al. 2004:5). The crocodile spewed forth water sent by the rain gods, which then formed Lake Peten Itza. In another Itzaj myth about the distant past, the rains stopped, and the water level of Lake Peten Itza shrank, except near P'ich Ayim, where the lake remained extremely deep. When a girl went to this place to fetch water, she saw a large

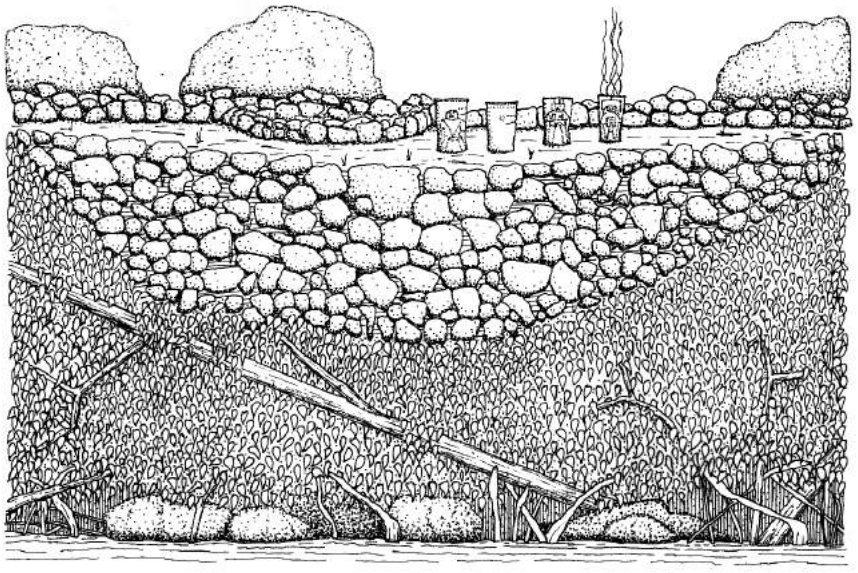

Figure 5.18. Late Postclassic Maya ceramic incense burners with modeled human figures on a terrace at the water's edge on Island #6, Lake Mendoza, Petén, Guatemala (drawing by Jack Scott).

crocodile in the middle of the lake who invited her to float on his back. The crocodile told her that if she sat on his penis the lake would never dry up (Tesucún Chan and Tesucún 1999:31–32). Another place on the lake is called Ayim Tun, "Crocodile Rock," because of the long rock in the lake here (Tesucún Chan and Tesucún 1999:4). Today, people living around Lake Peten Itza point to a large peninsula in the western part of the lake that resembles a giant crocodile resting in the water. Additionally, the Itzaj Maya call one of the islands Ixpetenha, an old name glossed as "Feminine Island in the Water" (Tesucún Chan and Tesucún 1999:11). This name may refer to the connection between women, islands, and water in Maya cultures, as we saw in earlier chapters. The name may also indicate that islands are gendered ritual landscapes, like mountains and springs. Importantly, the largest island in Lake Peten Itza is called Noh Peten or Noh P'eet (Large or Great Island) in Itzaj Mayan, referring to its size and political dominance before the conquest. The ruler Aj Kan Ek' led the Itzaj Maya to this island during a migration from Yucatán in the Postclassic period. The Itzaj from Yucatán, including the site of Chichen Itza (Mouth of the Water Hole of the Itza), had social ties at Lake

Figure 5.19. Fragments of Late Postclassic or historic Maya modeled ceramic incense burners, Island #6, Lake Mendoza, Petén, Guatemala. Note small copper bell designs on hems of clothing.

Peten Itza (Atran et al. 2004:4). Inscriptions at the Maya ruins of Motul de San José, for instance, mention a Classic Maya king who was the ruler of Itza or perhaps Itz Ha', "Place of Enchanted Water" (Caso Barrera and Aliphat Fernández 2002). This name may refer to the Itzaj Maya as "water wizards/enchanters," possibly based on their religious beliefs concerning Lake Peten Itza and the cenote at Chichen Itza (Atran et al. 2004:4).

Islands are the homes of Maya deities in the southern Maya lowlands (fig. 5.21), just as Cozumel was the abode of the goddess Ix Chel. In one case, an island in Lake Petha (called Pet ha' Itsanok'uh by some Lacandon) with platforms was the home of Itsanok'uh, an important god for the local Lacandon (Soustelle 1961:41). Lacandon women at Mensabak have recounted that their grandfathers told them they should not set foot on an island (called Muulik Na) directly to the north of Mirador Mountain, especially during the full or new moon, for they would become ill or make the earth shake. Male informants state that this island with a platform covered with Lacandon god pot fragments is the home of helpers of the god Mensabak, who lives in a cliff across the lake, or of Akna', the lunar goddess and wife of Mensabak. A connection between the Lacandon moon goddess and islands was also recorded by Marion (1999:168). The Lacandon Maya indicated that the lunar goddess Akna' (also [I]Xk'ale'ox) resides on islands, especially ones with ancient stone walls, like in the Usumacinta River near Yaxchilan (fig. 5.22). In these waters

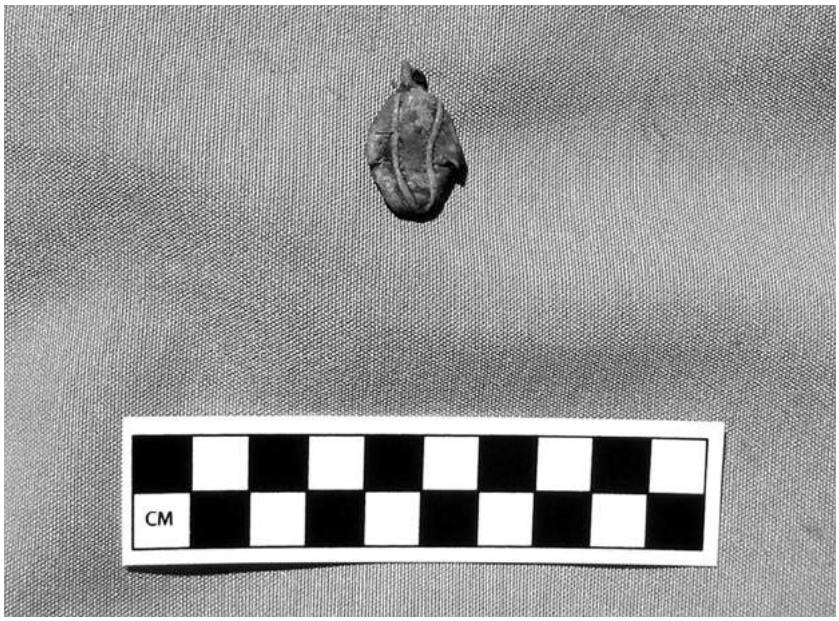

Figure 5.20. Small copper bell with a loop to attach to clothing, Lake Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico.

of creation Akna' resides near Hachakyum, a celestial deity who lives in the ruins of Yaxchilan. Furthermore, Akna' rests on islands during her earthly journeys; therefore, the Lacandon call islands *muulic na'* ("mound of [Ak] Na'" or "our mother"; Marion 1999:168n234).

HISTORIC INFORMATION ON MAYA ISLANDS

Islands in the Southern Maya Region may have served a ceremonial function or been destinations for pilgrims, as seen historically throughout Mesoamerica, including in the Aztec Tenochtitlan, on the Isla de Sacrificios near Veracruz, and on Cozumel Island. One important aspect of islands is that they can only be accessed by boat and are disconnected from settlements on the mainland. One possible reference to islands in Classic Maya inscriptions describes an island (peten) as the heart of the turtle, which refers to the cosmic turtle floating in the primordial sea. In Maya imagery the hollow carapace of the turtle is pierced, allowing communication or links between

Figure 5.21. View of island and cliff shrines from Mirador Mountain, Lake Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico. Note the small canoe in the middle of the lake.

watery, earthly, and heavenly realms (Taube 2010:212). The carapace also contains seeds, food, souls, and spiritual forces.

Some intriguing historic information on Maya ritual islands can be found for the Southern Maya Region. The Itzaj Maya island capital of Noh Peten (also called Tayasal [Ta Itzaj]) in Lake Peten Itza, for instance, was the main ritual and political center in central Petén well into the colonial period, and the island held an oracle and pilgrimage shrine for Late Postclassic to historic Maya. Noh Peten is the largest island in Lake Peten Itza, and the hill in its

Figure 5.22. Ancient Maya artificial island that supported a bridge in the Usumacinta River at the ruins of Yaxchilan, Chiapas, Mexico.

center supported Maya temples and then a Spanish church (fig. 5.23). Indeed, Maya people called this place Large/Great Island not only because of its size but because it housed the Itzaj Maya ruler and the principal temples, images (*ídolos*), and religious functions (Caso Barerra 2008:384). The Maya did not merely choose the island for defensive purposes due to the fact that large populations, including elites, lived on the lakeshore (Rice and Rice 2005) but instead viewed the island of Noh Peten, which was the home of their ruler and high priest, as the center of their social and religious landscape (Villagutierre Soto-Mayor 1983). The resident deities and oracles on the island, in addition to defensive walls along its shores, protected the Itzaj at the time of the Spanish conquest. Four islands and settlements governed by different nobles were located around this island, perhaps organized according to the cardinal points. Noh Peten itself was divided into four neighborhoods surrounding the ruler's residence, which contained the image of Yax Chel Cab, the blue-green primordial tree at the center of the world. These patterns were part of a general Maya quadripartite cosmos with a central point on the island (Astor-Aguilera 2010; Caso Barerra and Aliphat Fernández 2002:724–26). It is possible that these four divisions of Maya

Figure 5.23. Flores Island (Noh Peten of the Itzaj Maya) with a cathedral over Maya constructions on the island's leveled summit, Petén, Guatemala.

nobles on the island were associated with rain, fertility, and earth gods (Caso Barerra and Aliphat Fernández 2002:720).

A colonial period Itzaj Maya ruler of the island, Canek, described a "large island [Noh Peten] where he was [from] that had nineteen shrines or temples with their idols . . . which were large structures nearly two yards high, with very strong, thick walls, from which there extended inside a kind of platform of lime and cut polished stone, which served as a sitting place for the Indians" (Villagutierre Soto-Mayor 1983:256). The Spanish described Noh Peten as having many large temples filled with idols, incense burners, altars, and places for worshipers to gather (Villagutierre Soto-Mayor 1983:72, 313–16). One sanctuary on the plaza of the island center belonged to "the principal prophet," a Maya priest called Tut, who consulted the main oracular image in the temple (Villagutierre Soto-Mayor 1983:315). For example, the image warned Tut of the impeding Spanish attack on the island and offered its assistance in capturing the Spanish for sacrifices. Another temple contained bones from a horse left by Cortés that were utilized in Itzaj rituals (Villagutierre Soto-Mayor 1983:314–15). Not all Mayas in the region worshiped at the sanctuaries of Noh Peten. The Kowoj Maya, for instance, attempted to establish a "great island," possibly at

Figure 5.24. Islands with leveled summits at Lake Mendoza, Petén, Guatemala.

Yaxha, as a prominent ceremonial center after the Spanish conquest of the Itzaj Maya (Caso Barerra 2008:395).

The Itzaj Maya originally migrated to Noh Peten following conflict with other nobles in Yucatán (Caso Barrera and Aliphat Fernández 2002; Roys 1967). The Itzaj fled to this island and established a center there after stealing the bride of a powerful Yucatán leader during a wedding ceremony (Roys 1967:179). The kidnapped bride, named Sak Nikte (White Mayflower), became lonely and drowned herself in Lake Peten Itza (Atran et al. 2003:4). Or perhaps she was sacrificed and offered to the lake. These events are strikingly similar to events in the history of the Aztecs. The Aztec people founded their capital of Tenochtitlan on an island after fleeing from vengeful Culhua neighbors after sacrificing a Culhua princess during her marriage ceremony to the Aztec patron deity Huitzilopochtli (Durán 1994:36–37). The Mesoamerican ideal of founding a capital on an island may be an old one, or it could have been transmitted during interaction with people from central Mexico in the Postclassic period. The mythical homeland and most important sacred place of the Aztec or Mexica was Aztlan, an island with a mountain in a beautiful lake. The Mexica were led by Huitzilopochtli on a long pilgrimage from Aztlan to Tenochtitlan, another island on a lake, to establish, like the Itzaj, a ruling dynasty. These islands also contained temples and oracular images for communication with gods and ancestors.

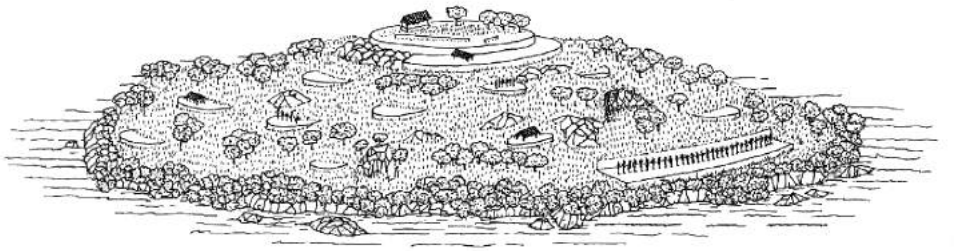

Figure 5.25. Reconstruction of modified island, Lake Mendoza, Petén, Guatemala. Note the terraces (estimated locations), exposed bedrock, and leveled summit (drawing by Jack Scott).

Other contact-period Maya islands of political and religious importance were located in lowland Chiapas. In the 1530s, conquistadores visited the Ch'olti'-Lacandon island settlements of Lakamtun in Lake Miramar, Pochutla in Lake Ocotal, and Topiltepeque (Vos 1988a:46–63). The first two political centers were founded on cliffs and exposed bedrock on islands, and the latter was on a highly defensible island in a large river, probably the Jatate River to the west of Lake Miramar (Nations 2006; Vos 1988a:490). Topiltepeque is from Nahuatl, meaning "Mountain of the Staffs/Sticks" (Vos 1988a:57), which indicates the importance of impressive geographical features in the Southern Maya Region. The name also refers to the fortification of this site with palisades—sticks that were used to delineate the ritual space of the plaza. Spanish chroniclers described Lakamtun in Lake Miramar as an island center of exposed bedrock and cliffs with about "sixty houses of warlike Indians" (Vos 1988a:50). The Maya built houses for their elites higher than the rest as well as a plaza in the middle of the settlement (Vos 1988a:108). The site was a political and religious center of the Ch'olti'-Lacandon Maya that was well fortified with sturdy houses painted white, "much like a real city" (Vos 1988a:50, 108).

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ISLANDS IN THE SOUTHERN MAYA LOWLANDS

To study Maya islands and ritual at the time of the conquest, we surveyed and excavated at Lake Mendoza in southwest Petén, which is located just to the west of Itzaj Maya sites (fig. 5.24; Palka 2009; Palka et al. 2007). While

archaeologists assume that island settlements existed mainly for defensive purposes, we have to consider their religious importance as well. Lake Mendoza has fourteen large islands, making the lake a prime location in which to study the use of islands by the Maya. Our excavations discovered ceramics dating from the Late Preclassic to the Late Postclassic periods on several islands (Palka et al. 2007), which include grater bowls, polychrome plates, water jars, and incense burners. Only a few low platforms have been found on the islands. The islands may have supported small Maya settlements, or they may have been used temporarily as pilgrimage destinations. Additionally, the islands' summits were leveled by the Maya, who also constructed oval terraces on the slopes (fig. 5.25). These constructions closely resemble terraces on Mirador Mountain at Lake Mensabak, which are described in the next chapter. Initially, I believed that the oval terraces on islands at Lake Mendoza provided enough space for houses on the slopes of the islands. However, the islands may have been modified for pilgrimage and the terraces built to facilitate the ascent to their summits, like at Mirador Mountain. In support of the pilgrimage interpretation, one island at Lake Mendoza (Island #7) only contains a ceremonial plaza, two temple mounds, and two small platforms that make up a ritual center constructed in the Late Preclassic period and then utilized in Early Classic and Late Postclassic times (fig. 5.26).

Lake Petha, found near Lake Mensabak in Chiapas, also contains islands with Maya constructions that were studied by Vann in the 1970s (fig. 5.27; Cook 2004). One large island had been extensively modified into a rectangular shape (fig. 5.28). Vann studied past Maya and Lacandon pilgrimage rituals at shrines built on the island and also dove in the lake and determined that some islands were built up with stone walls. Additionally, he reconfirmed statements by local Tzeltal Mayas that stone walkways connect the islands and peninsulas. Lake Petha was an important Maya pilgrimage destination because of its ritually significant cliffs with rock art and caves filled with human skeletons (Cook 2004; Maler 1901; Tozzer 1907).

Late Postclassic to early historic period Ch'olti'-Lacandon Maya ritual landscapes at Lake Miramar are similar to those found at Lakes Petha and Mensabak. The Miramar cliffs have painted rock art designs that include handprints, starlike symbols, and human figures (Rivero Torres 1992). Caves surrounding the lake also contain human skulls with the tabular erect cranial shaping common in the Late Postclassic period, which is seen also at Mensabak and Petha. Islands in Lake Miramar were important Maya ritual

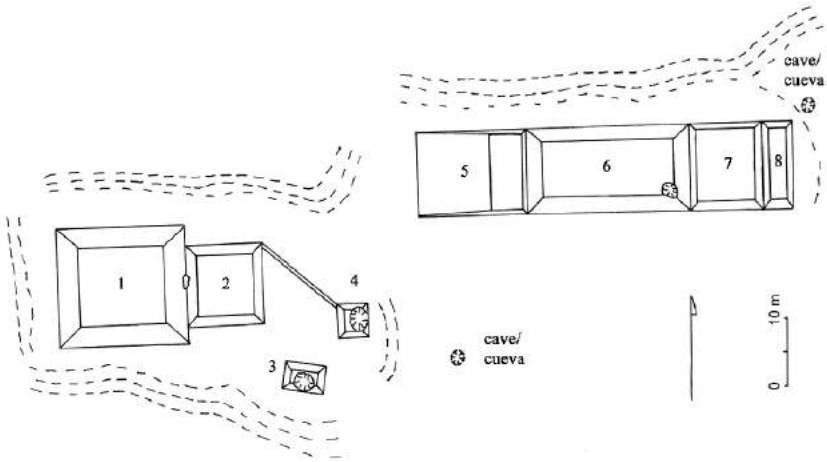

Figure 5.26. Late Preclassic Maya ceremonial architecture on Island #7, Lake Mendoza, Petén, Guatemala. Note caves, temples, and lack of residential platforms (map by Rebecca Deeb and Nam Kim).

landscapes with their temple constructions and three-dimensional human sculptures (Rivero Torres 1992). The material culture from the islands, including burials and offerings of painted pottery, points to their importance as ritual landscapes. Importantly, Spanish chroniclers reported that the Ch'olti'-Lacandon Maya inhabitants placed their dead in the waters near the islands (Comparato 1984; Villagutierre Soto-Mayor 1983).

In comparison, an island at Laguna de On in Belize was found to have shrine constructions and ritual deposits (Masson 2000:92, 97–99), perhaps from Maya pilgrimages. An early explorer recovered over two hundred ritual offerings from the island, including copper bells, ceramic effigy figurines, bowls, incense burners, jade beads, and obsidian blades (Masson 2000:98). At least one structure on the island had a ritual function in the Late Postclassic period. Close to the surface of this building, concentrations of broken ceramic incense burners, crania of large game animals, and a reused Maya Late Classic eccentric flint were recovered (Masson 2000:92–93). The animal skulls may have been used in ceremonies intended to release game from the home of the earth lord. Another Late Postclassic rubble platform on the high point of the island served as a shrine. Archaeologists

Figure 5.27. Lacandon Maya pilgrims at Lake Petha, Chiapas, Mexico (photograph by Marvin Vann, courtesy of the Albion College Archives and Special Collections).

collected several whole ceramic vessels from this structure and noted evidence of excessive burning on it, probably of ritual fires with incense (Masson 2000:97–98). Incense burners were produced by different potters, perhaps by visitors from various regions, and some examples were represented by single fragments (Masson 200:238), which may have been pilgrims' blessings or offerings. Contemporary settlements were located on the lakeshore; thus, the island may have had a specific ritual function. In addition to the main island, artificial islands formed from lake sediment were found on the south side of the lake. The lack of dense domestic debris suggests that they, too, were ritual in nature (Masson 2000:97). I explored a similar artificial island during a visit to Lake Puerto Arturo in northern Petén and would argue that there may be other such constructions in the Maya area, including Jaina.

At Progresso Lagoon in Belize, Maya pilgrims appear to have made pilgrimages to the ritual islands. The lakeshore contained a Late Postclassic political-religious center, cemeteries, and sites with clusters of ceramic incense burners (Oland and Masson 2005; Rosenswig and Masson 2002; fig. 5.29). The Maya also worshiped at mainland temples and ancestor shrines in the historic period (Oland 2009). Near a large elite Maya

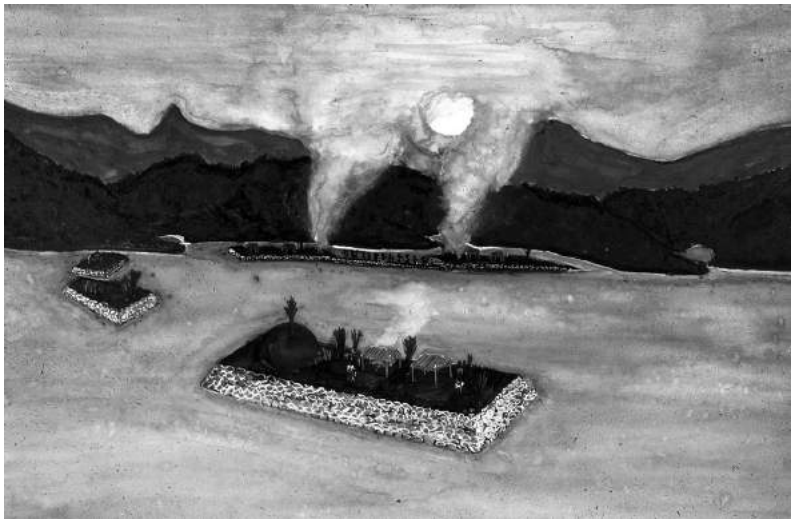

Figure 5.28. Reconstruction of rituals on artificial rectangular islands in Lake Petha, Chiapas, Mexico (painting by Marvin Vann, courtesy of the Albion College Archives and Special Collections).

structure on the shore of the lagoon, archaeologists recovered a unique ceramic stamp with remnants of red paint on it (fig. 5.30; Oland 2009:154, 325, fig. 5.11e). This stamp depicts a foot, quite possibly a pilgrim's foot, that is similar to designs in Postclassic Mesoamerican codices (Williams 2009:178), monuments (Smith and Hirth 2000:23, fig. 3.3-C), cave paintings (Rincón Mautner 2005:132; see fig. 2.18), and Postclassic Maya books (Thompson 1972:137, Serpent Numbers and Almanacs image 65, bottom; see fig. 2.24). Perhaps the Maya used this stamp to paint foot designs on the bodies and clothing of Maya pilgrims visiting the lagoon. The red print made by the stamp would have been the same color and shape as rock art designs on ritual cliffs and caves visited by pilgrims in the Maya area. In another surprise find, archaeologists discovered a Spanish glass medallion in the shape of a scallop shell in a midden near an elite Maya structure on the lakeshore (fig. 5.30; Oland 2009:165, 265, fig. 5.16b). This small artifact may have been used as a Christian pilgrim's shell badge for travelers to the church at Santiago de Compostela in Spain, as has been done over the centuries (Barnes and Branfoot 2006:36, fig. 27; Candy 2009:7, fig. 1.4). Alternatively, the shell may have been a pilgrim's object or blessing obtained at the church or its nearby markets. The symbolism of the scallop shell in

Figure 5.29. Elite Maya structure with ritual islands on the shore of Progresso Lagoon, Belize (photograph courtesy of Maxine Oland; see Oland 2009).

marking pilgrimage, perhaps learned from Spanish priests visiting the site, may have been important to Maya pilgrims. A large number and wide variety of exotic items from different parts of Mesoamerica were associated with the stamp and shell (Oland 2009:154), including stone formations from caves, hematite, copper, and serpentine, which supports the interpretation of pilgrimage and markets at the site.

Studies in the archaeology and ethnography of Maya pilgrimage to and ceremonies at bodies of water and islands have shown that these ritual landscapes have been utilized over a long period. Bodies of water are associated with rites for rain, good harvests, human fertility, and healing. Also, springs and lakes are thought of, like caves, as homes of the earth lords. Yet the association of Maya ritual waters and islands with feminine spiritual forces and powers of creation and regeneration is strong. Ceremonies at bodies of water have also been central for the Maya in making connections between ancestral places, the origins of people, and territory. Less research has been conducted on Maya ritual islands, but the information we have indicates that as

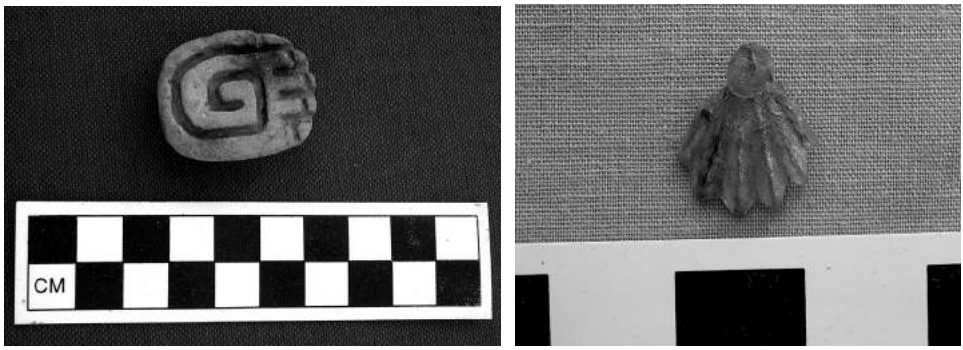

Figure 5.30. Historic Maya ceramic stamp of a footprint (Oland 2009:fig. 5-11e) and a glass scallop shell as a possible pilgrim token from Santiago de Compostela, Spain (Oland 2009:fig. 5-16b), Progresso Lagoon, Belize (photographs courtesy of Maxine Oland).

intersections between the underworld beneath the water, the surface of the earth, and the sky, they were important for fertility and renewal ceremonies as well, in addition to supporting regional religious centers and oracular shrines. Mountains and cliffs, which we visit in the next chapter, may have been viewed in a similar light, especially since they frequently are connected to caves and water.

CHAPTER SIX

Mountains of Sustenance and Cliffs of Paradise in Maya Pilgrimage

> The procession leaves the official's house [with drummers, flutists, ritual officials, and red banners] proceeding to the San Antonio Mountain. They ascend until the Cross and play their instruments until they reach the summit; there they play all night until the third day and do not sleep so they can preside over their God.
>
> —Ch'ol Maya narrative, José L. Pérez Chacón, *Los Choles de Tila y su mundo*, 1993, 214

Anthropological studies of Maya ritual landscapes focus on caves and cenotes, yet mountains are just as important, if not more so. In fact, it is often the combination of mountain, cave, and spring that makes ritual landscapes significant for Maya societies (Molesky-Poz 2006). Descriptions of ritual mountains dominated the earlier ethnographic literature, not because they are highly visible, but because they are central to Maya religion (Vogt 1981). Mountains are places to perform the rituals that maintain covenants between humans and the spiritual forces found there, including earth lords and ancestors. Additionally, the things people need to survive, like water and food, as well as the essences of all living things are contained within "hollow" mountains. Maya people also require the assistance of the mountain deities for curing the sick and during other crises, such as droughts and conflict. Finally, mountains near Maya communities figure in the construction of their identities and territories, for they are the places of origin of the ancestors. Ritual cliffs are conceptually similar to mountains; however, they are frequently viewed as doorways to the realms of spiritual forces located within mountains. Cliffs are also different in that they reflect

light and are lighter in color than forested mountains since they are usually made of white or yellow limestone. Importantly, their surfaces often contain rock art. In this chapter I discuss insights on Maya ritual cliffs and mountains in the Southern Maya Region (see fig. 1.9) from the ethnographic, historical, and archaeological records and highlight the importance of these landscape features for our understanding of Maya religion, pilgrimage, and community belonging.

ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDIES OF MAYA RITUAL MOUNTAINS

In addition to the caves and springs of highland Chiapas, mountains (*vitz* or witz) are important in Tzotzil Maya cosmology (fig. 6.1). Five principal ritual mountains at Zinacantan are associated with the four parts of the universe and its center (Vogt 1981:130). Tall pyramidal mountains house ancestral deities known as "fathers, mothers" (*totilme'iletik*; Vogt 1981:120–25), and each mountain has either male or female attributes (Vogt 1993:189). The tallest mountain, Bankilal Muk'ta Vits (Senior Large Mountain) is a male mountain and the home of the highest-ranking ancestral god, who keeps animals that are people's spirit companions (Vogt 1981:133, 189; Vogt and Vogt 1970:381). This mountain together with two adjacent peaks form a place called the Three Hearthstones (Oshyoket). The Tzotzil Maya construct shrines in their ritual landscapes, particularly at mountains, caves, and springs (Sheseña Hernández 2009; Vogt 1969; see fig. 2.11). Ancient Maya temples serve as similar shrines for they resemble the forms of mountains (see Vogt 1964, 1981:120, 123, 127, 134). These shrines include crosses, low walls, and cleared space, like plazas, for rituals. To delineate ceremonial space, Tzotzil Mayas set pine needles on the ground around their shrines. They also encircle the shrines with candles to protect them from witches (Vogt 1993:75). These practices frame ritual space so that beneficial energies can be contained and malevolent forces repelled (Vogt 1993:59, 86), and these beliefs explain the leveling of mountain summits and construction of plazas on them in the past.

According to the Tzotzil Maya, ritual landscapes are alive with animistic forces and supernatural energies. Each place is the home of specific deities (Vogt 1981:133–35). Mountains are also the abodes of ancestral gods, who are distantly related to the Tzotzil Maya. For instance, the Tzotzil from Zinacantan, who are known as salt traders, have soul essences housed in a mountain with a salt mine (Pitarch Ramón 1996:43). The landscape is a visual

Figure 6.1. Tzotzil Maya shrine and cemetery on a ritual hill in highland Chiapas, Mexico.

record of Tzotzil mythology, history, and religion. Importantly, Tzotzil ritual places with shrines represent their social units, including lineages, hamlets, and the township in general. The landscape serves as a place to communicate with ancestors, and each shrine functions to set social boundaries between groups within the community. For example, house shrines are used by families, water hole shrines by hamlets, and mountains by community members. Furthermore, Tzotzil ritual mountains exemplify Mesoamerican "mountains of abundance" that contain everything that people in communities adjacent to them require. In Tzotzil society at Chalchihuitan, for instance, beings in mountains are called Yahwal Witz, "Owners of the Mountains," or *anhel*, "lightning" (Vogt and Stuart 2005:170) and are perhaps equivalent to Tlaloc. These deities own game animals, provide rain, and guard the essence of maize (*shch'ulel ishim*). The deities resemble Ladino ranchers, but their corrals contain deer and not livestock. These deities, along with the sun god, are given offerings and prayers that they might cure sick people in the community and send good crops.

Regarding Maya mountain symbolism, Holland (1964:302–3) reports that the Tzotzil in Larrainzar believe that the heavens are divided into thirteen

layers within the "mountain of earth." The most important gods associated with these layers are the sun and the moon. Today, the Tzotzil conceptually place the sun (also Christ), the moon goddess (Virgin Mary), and Catholic saints among the thirteen levels of the heavens (Holland 1964:303). Similarly, the Ch'orti' Maya perceive the sky realms as thirteen planes on a staircase in a pyramid that is a ritual mountain (Girard 1995:243). These beliefs are similar to the views of the Q'eqchi' Maya of Guatemala regarding their thirteen principal earth deities (Adams and Brady 1994; Schackt cited in Monaghan 2000:26–27). The thirteen partitions between the earth and sky realms and associated deities help to explain the thirteen terraces on ancient Maya ritual mountains in Chiapas, as we will discuss. Maya people symbolically moved through these realms like the sun when they went up and down mountains to provide offerings to distinct gods at shrines in each level.

Furthermore, ancestors live in ritual mountains, according to the Tzotzil from Larrainzar (Holland 1964:302). When a Maya person is born, a companion spirit animal (*wayijel*) arrives at the same time in the ritual mountain (*ch'ibal*) associated with the person's lineage (Holland 1964:303). Additionally, Tzotzil people's life essences, located in the heart (*ch'ulel*), have thirteen parts that are linked to animal spirits living in mountains (Vogt 1965:44–45). These lineage mountains have thirteen celestial levels, and they symbolize the sky since mountains ascend to the heavens. Ancestral deities and companion animals occupy the different levels of the mountain, and the most powerful essences are found up in the thirteenth level. Similarly, the Tzotzil perceive the sky as a mountain with thirteen stepping stones, six to the west, six to the east, and the thirteenth in the middle, forming the sky's midpoint (Girard 1995:243). In the Maya cosmos, the sun ascends in the east and moves through the first six celestial realms, reaches its zenith in the seventh, and then moves six steps to the west (Thompson 1970:195). The Tzotzil also view ritual mountains as being linked from top to bottom by a stairway much like a pyramid. Contemporary Tzotzil Mayas perform agricultural and curing rituals at these mountains with artificially leveled cross shrines on their summits (Holland 1964). These mountains have also been used to bury the dead (Holland 1964:304). These insights underscore the ritual power of thirteen levels or "compartments" in the cosmos for Maya people.

The earth's surface figures prominently in the beliefs of modern Tzeltal Mayas. Most divine essences with which the Tzeltal coexist and have reciprocal relations with are found on the surface of the earth and not in the sky or under the ground (Pitarch Ramón 1996:205). Lakes, caves, and mountains are

the main domains of these essences, especially if they are associated with areas away from settlements. Tzeltal religious specialists (*ch'abajom*) believe that mountains are critical for healing ceremonies because crucial information regarding diagnoses and cures for illnesses can be obtained from the deities within them. Effective healers state that they "leave to talk with the sacred mountain, pass to the interior of the mountains . . . and learn through prayer to talk to the willing [entities], the mothers-fathers" (Pitarch Ramón 1996:19). During pilgrimage rituals, the healers give offerings to mountain essences, including white hens, liquor, flowers, incense, candles, and tobacco, which satisfy the resident spiritual forces by "shining their eyes, shining their feet" (Pitarch Ramón 1996:38–40). Proper ritual oration is also necessary to maintain the reciprocity with the mountain and the essences inside.

In Tzeltal Maya cosmology at Cancuc, four ritual mountains (known as *ch'iibal* or "nursery/place where [botanical] things grow"; Pitarch Ramón 1996:40) form the four pillars of the cosmos in the corners of the earth's rectangular surface. The mountains are found in the four cardinal directions far from Cancuc, which recalls Maya quadripartite world divisions (Astor-Aguilera 2010). These mountains contain the soul essences (*u ch'ulel*) of people from the four main lineage groups of the town (Pitarch Ramón 1996:19, 35). Recently, two lineages came together and are now associated with the same mountain since they believe one of their mountains flooded with water or was infested with ants (Pitarch Rámon 1996:36n3). One ritual mountain, Ajk'abalnaj ("[He of the] Dark House" or "House of Night"), is located one day's walk north from the Tzeltal town of Yalajon. Another important mountain called Yalanch'en (Low Cave/Cliff) can be visited to the south after a two-day journey. To the southeast, pilgrims arrive at the mountain named Ijk'alwitz' (Black Mountain) after a few hours' walk. These mountains are not tall, but they are important to the Tzeltal Maya because of their pyramidal form. According to the Tzeltal Maya, the interiors of mountains contain maize fields, natural springs, fruit trees, coins, and exotic goods, such as radios, cars, and televisions, but these goods are "not of tangible substances [like electricity], they are *ch'ulel*" (Pitarch Ramón 1996:37). They believe that the essences inside the mountains celebrate festivals with liquor. Each mountain has thirteen inner horizontal levels (*oxlahun lam ch'iibal*), as does the sky (*oxlahun lam ch'ulchan*; Pitarch Ramón 1996:203). Tzeltal Maya souls occupy chambers in the mountain's thirteen levels, which are divided by doors in the top three tiers (Pitarch Ramón 1996:37).

Tzeltal curers describe the qualities of ritual mountains; for example, they contain life, being the home of the "mothers-fathers," who are the progenitors and protectors of people. Ritual mountains also contain chairs and benches for worshipers, areas where offerings to the deities are given, and places where ancestors and essences pass before the feet and hands of worshipers and are associated with the color yellow (Pitarch Ramón 1996:38–39) because of their limestone surfaces. The presence of chairs may refer to the way that curers sit while they provide offerings to essences, or the mothers-fathers, within the mountain so they can heal the sick. The reference to people's feet and hands perhaps describes the presence and mutual touching of divine beings, ancestors, and worshipers at the mountain, which may be symbolized by painted feet and handprints at ritual places. For the Tzeltal Maya, another class of ritual mountain (*witz'*, also witz) is the home of powerful lords or owners of the mountains (called Ajaw, Angel, or Yajwal Witz'; Pitarch Ramón 1996:48). These beings or essences have human aspects, and each mountain has separate essences; in other words, there is not just one earth lord. Some of these owners of the mountains appear as old men, while others resemble fat Ladinos, Lacandon Mayas, or European women, all clearly outsiders to Tzeltal society (Pitarch Ramón 1996:49).

The ritual mountains where spiritual essences reside are seen as feminine or masculine, depending on their features and the ways their slopes curve. When these mountains wed, they produce fertile soils (Pitarch Ramón 1996:49). They also have corresponding alter egos: women with fish tails (beings called *sirenas*) and the monstrous *tzotz k'ab* or "hairy hand" (Pitarch Ramón 1996:55–56, note 2). Tzeltal Mayas leave offerings for the mountain owners so that they will remain happy, marry, and produce rich fields (Pitarch Ramón 1996:49). The owners of the mountains interact with one another by means of subterranean passages, and the living can communicate with them through fissures in the ground, including springs and caves. The owners of the mountains are wealthy and have many treasures. They are the owners of animals, which they keep corralled in the mountains and turn loose when they wish (Pitarch Ramón 1996:55n2). Hunters provide offerings to the mountain owners so they will release game. Snakes live in these mountains, as do other animals associated with rain, such as frogs.

In a similar example of "mountains of abundance," the Tzeltal Maya at Guaquitepec believe that ritually important mountains with spiritual essences (*ch'ul witz*) are alive and provide things for people who live nearby, including maize, firewood, and water (Vogt and Stuart 2005:172). The

essences also consume these things. Specific mountains are the homes of deities, saints, and the protector of wildlife, who can only be approached during rituals. Mountains surrounding the town of Ocosingo, Chiapas, have been artificially transformed into prominent pyramidal hilltops: "A spur of the mountain had in ancient times been leveled and shaped to the form of an immense pyramid, rising in [thirteen] terraces" (Blom and La Farge 1926:252). Tzeltal Mayas from Ocosingo carried out rituals to the "god of the mountain" on these hills and in the caves and ruins associated with them. In another instance, the Ch'orti' Maya believe that rain gods, or angels, live on the summits of four mountains, two to the east and two to the west of the town of Quetzaltepeque (Girard 1995:150–59). Mountains mark the borders of the Ch'orti' world, and they perceive their community as the center of the universe. The rain gods in the mountains play drums that produce the noise of thunder and throw stone axes or knives as lightning bolts. They use the lightning bolts to open the clouds so that rain falls on the earth. The gods pick up water from ritually important springs and lakes to seed the clouds. They ride on or travel with supernatural beings seen as serpents and birds, which make up the clouds. The serpents are filled with water and an abundance of things; therefore, they provide the Ch'orti' with rain, plentiful harvests, children, cattle, and other necessities. Ch'orti' elders help obtain these things through their communication with spiritual forces and their offerings during rituals at significant places.

In the southern Maya lowlands, the Itzaj Maya have named the ritual mountains near Lake Peten Itza, which is an indication of their beliefs in living mountains or mountains as homes of gods. The neighbors of the Itzaj Maya, the Kowoj Maya, attempted to establish a pilgrimage shrine on the local mountain called Bochan ("?-snake?"), where they maintained a temple for sacrifices (Caso Barerra 2008:395). Until recently, the Itzaj Maya prayed at ritual mountains near Lake Peten Itza, and they believed in the owners of the mountains (Schumann 1971:12). One of the more distant mountains from the lake is called Sayab', or "Spring," by older Itzaj Mayas because a spring exists on its summit (Tesucún Chan and Tesucún 1999:51). The name Tz'unu'un Witz, or "Hummingbird Mountain," describes a mountain to the west of the lake where hummingbirds (and thus flowers) were once plentiful (Tesucún Chan and Tesucún 1999:52). Clearly, water or flower mountains, known for other Mayas, were once central ritual landscapes for Itzaj worshipers.

Ethnographies of neighboring highland Maya groups in western Guatemala are important for this study since they provide enlightening

examples regarding ritual mountains and community identity. The Q'anhob'al Maya connect mountains with ancestral lands and territory, and they view mountains as abodes of ancestral deities who provided health, goods, and food, in addition to associating them with lineages and community boundaries. For instance, one Q'anhob'al ritual mountain, called Yalañ K'uh (Under the Sun/Spiritual Entity) after a principal deity, was a prominent mountain with Maya ruins, a pool of water, and a previous Q'anhob'al settlement (La Farge 1947:122–27). Q'anhob'al religious specialists gave blood offerings to this mountain for protection for the people and defense of their settlements. Ceremonies were also conducted by the Q'anhob'al Maya on hills surrounding the town of Santa Eulalia to demarcate and consecrate their territory (La Farge 1947:126). The most ritually important site at Jacaltenango is a prominent mountain called K'anil that overlooks the town. Its level summit, which was modified in the past, supports an archaeological site (Borgstede 2010:387). This ruin on the mountain is the home of K'anil, the founding ancestor, protector deity, and war god of the Jakaltek Maya, who are relatives of the Q'anhob'al Maya. Contemporary Jakaltek people travel to the site to perform rituals to petition K'anil for good harvests, safe childbirth, and marriage partners, in addition to giving respect to ancestors (Borgstede 2010:387–88). The role of K'anil as community founder and protector is central to Jakaltek rituals, as is the fact that the site is associated with their ancestors. The rituals at this important shrine of a patron deity and the ancestors thus link the Maya with their past and invoke community identity (Borgstede 2010:388), as well as territorial boundaries.

Mountains and Modern Maya Pilgrimage

When the Tzotzil Maya of Zinacantan speak of ceremonial circuits and pilgrimages to mountains, caves, and water holes, they use the term *xkolet ek'el*, which means "they are walking in formation" (Vogt 1993:42–43). This concept refers to the order in which people walk single file to shrines according to age, sex, and ritual experience. This order is maintained in pilgrimages, even when people are walking to distant places. The pilgrimages are highly ritualized to show respect for the gods and their abodes (Vogt and Vogt 1970:388). In one Tzotzil pilgrimage, several ritual sites were visited by men who left offerings to contact resident divine forces (Vogt 1993:110–11). One of the first stops was at a large rock (*k'ut ton*) found on the side of a cliff where prayers and candles were offered to deities in this shrine. The next shrine was

on a mountain (Iz'inal Kalvaryo), a meeting place of the ancestral gods living inside. Following rituals at this shrine, the pilgrims reached the cave shrine called Bankilal K'ut Ch'en, where they left candles to the earth lord. The last two ritual places visited were Bankilal Kalvaryo, another mountain meeting place of ancestral gods, and Iz'inal K'ut Ch'en, another cave shrine. Symbolism related to "seeing" abounds in Tzotzil descriptions of processions and pilgrimage circuits (Vogt 1993:205). For instance, a ritual called the "great seeing" (*muk'ta ilel*) refers to the lengthy pilgrimage to mountain shrines and their unparalleled vistas. The pilgrims, called h'ilol ("seer"; Vogt and Vogt 1970:380), see gods within the mountains with the aid of religious specialists. Visits to community officers' homes during rituals at Zinacantan are called *il na* (house seeing), which refers to communication with or "seeing" the gods. Similar statements about "seeing" occur in Maya hieroglyphs on cave walls, as I have pointed out in earlier chapters.

During the Tzotzil pilgrimages and ceremonial circuits, ritual specialists arrive at cross shrines at the bases of ritual mountains to burn candle and incense offerings to ancestral deities, the former being the "tortillas" and the latter the "cigarettes" of the gods (Vogt 1981:122). Music, noise, and dance with drums, flutes, bells, rattles, string instruments, and fireworks are also important for they call the gods and please them (Vogt 1993:101, 115, 122, 144). Tzotzil healers from Zinacantan also visit certain mountains in ritual circuits to give offerings to the ancestral deities to appease them and request that they help balance the cosmos and thus heal the sick (Vogt 1993:75–78; Vogt and Vogt 1970). A person becomes sick when his or her animal companion spirit (*chanul*) or soul essence (ch'ulel) is released from its mountain corral by ancestral deities. The offerings persuade the ancestral gods to return the animal spirit to the mountain and restore health to the sick. Tzotzil ritual mountains have cross shrines at their bases and on their summits. Rituals at the bases greet deities living there and rites on the summits facilitate communication with ancestral gods in the mountain. The bases are the entrances to the gods' houses, whereas the summits are their household shrines (Vogt and Vogt 1970:387). From the bases of mountains, the pilgrims travel up steep paths to the summits, where they burn candles and incense in order to come face-to-face with their deities through the crosses at the shrines there. The ancestral gods receive the offerings of food, candles, incense, and liquor that please and sustain them (Vogt 1981:125).

For the Tzotzil Maya at Chamula, the earth and mountains are full of caves where earth owners, snakes, and demons live (Vogt and Stuart

2005:166). These deities generate precipitation in addition to thunder, lightning, and clouds. The tallest and most important mountain near Chamula, called Tzontevitz (Moss Mountain), contains a major pilgrimage shrine. It is the home of an ancestral deity and contains animal spirit companions of the Tzotzil people (Vogt and Stuart 2005:166–67). The shrine on the summit of this mountain includes a cave on its west side with crosses inside. Religious specialists make pilgrimages to this mountain shrine to perform curing ceremonies for individuals who have experienced soul loss (Vogt and Stuart 1993:167–68). They leave offerings to appease the ancestral god and recuperate lost soul essences and to ward off the malevolent forces that cause illness. When Zapatistas took over the nearby town of San Cristobal, religious specialists went to this shrine to request help from the ancestral gods to repel the Zapatistas from Chamula (Vogt and Stuart 2005:168).

Pérez Chacón (1993:194) describes one Maya pilgrimage in which the Ch'ol Maya from Tila climb the mountain of San Antonio, a major local ritual landscape, to conduct ceremonies at a cross shrine on its summit. This mountain contains the cave home of the Black Christ of Tila, although in the past the Black Christ appeared on the summit (Pérez Chacón 1993:315). During the fiesta of Santa Cruz, Ch'ol religious specialists climb this mountain to reach the cross shrine while playing musical instruments and carrying an image of Jesus (El Señor Chiquito) and red flags (Pérez Chacón 1993:214–15). They remain on the summit all night praying to their god (El Señor) at the cross. Then the townspeople pilgrimage up to the shrine to make offerings ("promises") to their god. The religious specialists offer prayers and candles day and night to complete their own and the pilgrims' obligations to their god in exchange for health, goods, work, and harvests. They terminate the festival when they take the image of Jesus off the mountain and back to the church. The Ch'ol state that the Black Christ chose the church and mountain at Tila to become his abodes (Pérez Chacón 1993:312). In another rite described by Pérez Chacón (1993:222), a Ch'ol Maya farmer went to the summit of San Antonio to make offerings and "promises" to appease spiritual forces. He performed this ritual to ask for rain for his parched corn, which was subsequently sent. Ritual mountains are not only the homes of gods and the source of things Ch'ol people need, they also contain *nagual*, which are the soul essences of animals and people (Pérez Chacón 1993:206), and are made up of twelve rooms, each with twelve doors, where people's souls are enclosed when they are ill (Pérez Chacón 1993:290). Perhaps the summit of the mountain is the thirteenth area.

We have further insightful ethnographic information on mountains as ritual landscapes and pilgrimage destinations for the Q'eqchi' Maya residing in Guatemala. The Q'eqchi' Maya from Chahal live within a rugged topography of valleys and mountains riddled with caves. The importance of ritual landscapes in Q'eqchi' social integration and identification may have been reinforced by the Spanish colonial policy of granting territory to the indigenous communities that inhabited it (Gonzalo 1999:259). Their identification with important landscape features defines Q'eqchi' social order and their daily lives. For instance, their corn farming ties them physically and spiritually to the landscape, and it structures their view of the cosmos. According to the Q'eqchi' worldview, agricultural lands are integrated into ritual landscapes, the distinction between living and nonliving things breaks down, and the landscape is essential for survival. The ritual landscape is central to Q'eqchi' life, and they link ritual in these places to their politics, economics, and domestic space. To maintain their communities and the social ties among themselves and their tutelary deities, the Q'eqchi' interact with the surrounding landscape through pilgrimage rituals in which they negotiate their community, ethnic, and personal identity, in addition to laying claims to the land (Wilson 1995:51–52).

Important Q'eqchi' ritual landscapes include mountains, valleys, and caves. Mountains are centrally important to the maintenance of community identity, and they are the focus of mythology, stories of community origins, and contemporary ceremonies. Q'eqchi' communities are actually named after ritual mountains. Only at mountains can Mayas communicate with mountain or earth deities and fulfill agreements with them. Male ritual specialists go to caves to provide offerings to mountain spirits (*tzuultak'a*, "mountain valley"), who are important for human and agricultural fertility, human health, and the continuation of the world. These deities, which have male or female attributes, are the owners and guardians of the mountains and everything within, including water, land, plants, animals, and people's souls, which are released by the deities through ritual. The relationship is based on reciprocal obligations: people and mountain spirits feed each other by giving what the other needs, either offerings or rain and food.

Moreover, the Q'eqchi landscape is alive, has agency and feelings, and thus behaves unpredictably, much like humans. Features of the Q'eqchi' Maya landscape also reflect gender roles and symbolism. For instance, hills can be masculine or feminine, the latter producing water (Gonzalo 1999:261). In their myths, the Q'eqchi' recount that thirteen men were responsible for

maize cultivation, and they became thirteen local ritual mountains (Gonzalo 1999:260). Perhaps these beings are related to the Yucatec Maya celestial god or gods Oxlahun Ti K'uh (Thirteen [of the] Deities), who are associated with light and the sun in world creation (Paxton 2009:78). Additionally, the Q'eqchi' Maya believe in a principal deity called the God of the Hill (Tzuultak'a or "Hill-Valley"), an earth lord who is essential to everyday life (Gonzalo 1999:259). This deity is the lord of everything, including crops, trees, animals, and the earth itself. The earth lord is viewed as part of nature and the hills themselves but has human qualities. To farm a field, hunt game animals, or harvest corn, the Q'eqchi' must make requests of the earth lord through rituals at mountains (Gonzalo 1999:260). If harvests are bad and hunts unsuccessful, then the proper offerings and prayers were not given or accepted by the earth lord.

Q'eqchi' community members interact with mountain deities around their communities with whom they have a moral relationship; if they move, they risk upsetting the balance since they do not know the identities of other mountains and what they require (Wilson 1995:55–56). Elders interact with mountain deities, which boosts their authority, and they consult with the spirits to plan events and ceremonies. People who dream or communicate with spirits and are religious specialists are called "he/she who sees" (*aj ilonel*; Wilson 1995:56), as in those who see the gods in Maya pilgrimage rites. In the past, Q'eqchi' men went to mountain caves to let blood from their bodies as a sacrifice to the mountain deities. Additionally, communities once participated in cave ceremonies at the mountains, but these ceremonies demanded complete unity, purity, and "goodness in the heart," which are difficult to create collectively (Wilson 1995:68–70). To achieve success in the rites, individuals refrained from sexual activity, moderated their activities, generated good thoughts, held ceremonies on the right days in the native calendar, and played music. Women, especially older women, were important in the preparations for the rituals at mountains and created the ceremonial offerings, such as food, drink, candles, chocolate, and incense.

Q'eqchi' pilgrimages begin with pilgrims placing offerings on the household altar to ask for permission to undertake the journey (Wilson 1995:70). They leave in the dark in order to arrive at the shrine at sunrise. Before entering the cave shrine, they remove their Western clothing to show the deities they do not have riches. Offerings of candles are given, and cave rocks and earth are touched or kissed. Pilgrims move carefully since they are in a ritual place and are affected emotionally by participating in a ritual in an unusual

environment. When they reach a natural limestone altar deep in the cave, they provide thirteen candles for the thirteen great mountain deities, bottles of corn beer, corn dough, turkeys, turkey blood, incense, and chocolate (Wilson 1995:71–72). The incense summons the mountain deities and carries the smells of the food, prayers, and messages to them, making them happy. Then the Maya worshipers say to the mountain lord, "O Mountain Lord, here I am underneath your feet and hands . . . thank you for I was able to come across many mountains, valleys, leagues, days . . . now I am here in your mountain . . . to beg for our help, health, happiness, to offer our sacrifice to you . . . here I am to pay the sacred forest . . . give your blessing on my corn field . . . we are doing as our ancestor the Mayas did, they who loved our mountain deities" (Wilson 1995:73–74). Q'eqchi' pilgrims communicate reverence to the mountain deities, who are treated as superordinates. They give presents of food and drink, but they expect reciprocity from the deities in the form of rain, good crops, riches, and health (Wilson 1995:75–77). The Q'eqchi' pilgrims refer to their ancestors' rites in these ritual places and call the mountain deities their "father-mothers," effectively tying kinship and ancestral ties to ritual landscapes and conjoining past experiences with the present (Wilson 1995:80–85). Through pilgrimage rites, the Q'eqchi' Maya lay claim to their traditional lands and their divinely sanctioned rights to retain them, particularly now with mounting threats to their territory from outsiders.

LOWLAND MAYA RITUAL MOUNTAINS IN SPANISH DOCUMENTS

We know from records from the Southern Maya Region that ritual landscapes were important at the time of the Spanish conquest. Significant geographical features, including rivers, caves, the deep forest, and especially mountains, were personified and associated with spiritual essences in Ch'olti'-Lacandon Maya culture in lowland Chiapas (Vos 1988a:181). *Ch'olti'* is an ethnic term from Moran's dictionary and grammar meaning "the people [speech] of the corn field" (Robertson et al. 2010:4), and the Ch'olti'-Lacandon Mayan term for town, or territory, was *luum*, "earth" or "land" (Thompson 1938:603). Others called the Ch'olti' and their territory Lakamtun or Lakanton (Wide Stone Place; see chapter 1) from the name of the Ch'olti'-Lacandon island center with cliffs in Lake Miramar. These terms speak to Ch'olti'-Lacandon Maya identity and cultural connections to their

landscape, fields, and territory. At Ch'olti'-Lacandon settlements, images of spiritual essences belonging to communities and ritual landscapes—the community idols mentioned in documents—were housed in special buildings in the ceremonial center. Furthermore, people kept images of family or lineage deities in their houses (Vos 1988a:181), and they placed similar images along forest trails, in caves, and on mountaintops. The Ch'olti'-Lacandon at Sac Bahlam had community images dedicated to their principal gods, many of which had mountain abodes.

Ritual mountains and their resident deities were central symbols of Ch'olti'-Lacandon Maya community lands. One Ch'olti'-Lacandon deity, Laxavitz (probably Yaxwitz or Yaxha Witz, "Green Mountain" or "Green Water Mountain"; Vos 1988a:181), may have been associated with the earth or a particular mountain in the Chiapas lowlands near their island settlement in Lake Miramar or perhaps at the later Ch'olti'-Lacandon capital of Sac Bahlam. This deity may have been related to the spiritual essence called Taxanitz (Tasin Witz or "Shaking Mountain," referring to earthquakes or volcanoes; Comparato 1984:13). Another deity linked to a ritual mountain was Ahate, or perhaps Ahau Te (Ajaw Te). The name may have come from a noble's title related to foliage, forest, and land (Yahawte) from ancient Maya inscriptions (Martin and Grube 2008:86, 88) and is also the name of a mountain shrine utilized by the Pokomchi Maya in Guatemala (Comparato 1984:13), which may have been a ritual place of the Ch'olti'-Lacandon or Manche-Ch'ol. Perhaps the Jatate (Yahawte [?]) River near Lake Miramar received its name from this deity.

Another Ch'olti'-Lacandon earth or mountain deity was called Xcacuihalal (equivalent to Ix Kak Witz Halal, "Feminine Fire Mountain Arrow"; Comparato 1984:12–13, note g), whose mountain may have housed an oracle related to war. Mountain names indicate that Ch'olti' mountains were seen as male or female, as believed by other Maya peoples (Adams and Brady 1994). The historic lowland Maya deity Quizin (Kisin) dwelled in underground abodes, perhaps in mountain and caves. This deity was believed by historic Ch'olti'-Lacandon and contemporary Lacandon Mayas to cause earthquakes and sickness (Comparato 1984:12–13, note c; Tozzer 1907). The deity Zintun, possibly Sinan Tuun, "Scorpion Stone," was related to the spiritual energy in particular stones or perhaps stones, boulders, or cliffs in general (Comparato 1984:12–13, note a). Still another Ch'olti'-Lacandon god, Tepecthic, might have been connected with a ritual mountain since the term *tepec* may stem from the Nahuatl word *tepetl*, "mountain/hill" (Comparato

1984:12–13, note h). This and other Nahuatl words are present in lowland Maya languages due to interactions with Aztecs during Late Postclassic to historic times (Bruce 1968; Vos 1988a). Lastly, the Ch'olti'-Lacandon Maya referred to their gods and their images as *mam* (grandfather) out of respect. Historic Maya populations in Guatemala and Belize also refer to deified mountains with the kinship term *mam* (Thompson 1938:595). This practice connects ritual landscapes, particularly mountains, with Maya lineage organization, the high social status of elder men, and community identity. These ritual landscapes influenced Maya settlement patterns in the study area. Importantly, the Ch'olti'-Lacandon built their center of Sac Bahlam in a savanna at the foot of an important mountain, the Cerro de los Gemelos or "Mountain of the Twins" (Vos 1988a:13, 157). They probably wished to maintain contact with important natural deities in ritual landscapes and ceremonially tie them to their new settlement. Furthermore, a mountain called Xanabcu (Janab [?] K'uh), whose name probably derived from the Mayan term Janab K'uh or "Flower [Mountain ?] God," was located on the other side of the savanna, probably to the east. This name refers to the ancient Maya mountain of life, prosperity, and abundance (Taube 2004). Another Ch'olti'-Lacandon satellite community appears to have been constructed at the base of a hill, possibly the hill named Tzocho or Tzocbo, to which a local Maya ruler escaped during the Spanish invasion of 1695 (Houwald 1979:419; Vos 1988a:158). This community may have been the village called Batwitz (Ax Mountain [?]), which was constructed behind this large mountain or witz (Hellmuth 1972:185).

The name of the historic site of Sac Bahlam (White Jaguar/Puma [?]) may also be derived from the name of a mountain or important ritual place, perhaps on the savanna where it was located. This place-name is similar to the place-name Sak Tzi' (White Dog) in Classic Maya inscriptions in lowland Chiapas, which may be read as Sak Bahlam in some cases when the sign has a jaguar's head instead of a dog's (Martin and Grube 2008:146). These terms may refer to local gods and their mountain abodes. The Spanish also discovered a village of about twenty well-constructed houses, called Kabenal or Kabnal (*kab*, "earth," and *nal*, "corncob" or "place"), which was named after an elite person or lineage from Lakamtun Island in Lake Miramar (Vos 1988a:100, 110). It is possible that the word is related to the name of a local mountain god as well. The names *Kabenal* and *Lakanton*, which are still used by the Tzeltal and Tzotzil Maya to refer to lowland Lacandon populations, may signify the linking of places and territories with ethnic groups. The

Ch'olti'-Lacandon formed other settlements in the region, including one called Culuacan (Vos 1988a:117). This name was also derived from the Nahua ritual mountain called Culhuacan, associated with Aztec origins, gods, and ancestors. Intriguingly, a prominent mountain (today called Naj Chac, "House of the Rain God") with a curved top that resembles the depiction of Culhuacan in codices is located just to the west of Lake Miramar (fig. 6.2; Palacios 1928:111–12, figs. 68 and 109, 150, fig. 108). The ancient Maya aligned mounds with this mountain and Classic period stelae at nearby sites show nobles arriving on a mountain (Palacios 1928:112, 121), likely this prominent curved one. Ruins, ritual caves, and mountain shrines dating to Late Postclassic times are also found in the area—could they belong to the Ch'olti'-Lacandon settlement of Culuacan?

Historic Lowland Maya Pilgrimage to Mountain Shrines

Spanish documents contain insights regarding lowland Maya pilgrimage shrines. The historic period Manche-Ch'ol Maya in southern Petén, for instance, did not have "idols," nor did they "worship images" according to Catholic priests. Rather, they performed their sacrifices and rituals in the forest, on high rocky mountains, in dangerous passes, and at whirlpools in rivers (Thompson 1938:594). During specific ceremonies, Manche-Ch'ol Maya ritual specialists created a "great arbor in a canyon" (Feldman 2000:110), possibly near a hill or cliff. Here they burned incense and provided offerings in ceramic pans or ladle-type incense burners at the altar they constructed. They also drank alcoholic beverages and let blood at this place. Two mountains in the Manche-Ch'ol Maya region were particularly important for historic Maya pilgrimage rituals. The first mountain, called Vatanchu (probably Votan ch'u, the lord/god Votan from historic Maya mythology in Chiapas; Calnek 1988), was located on the trail to the regional capital of San Miguel Manche. On the summit of this mountain, Spanish explorers found a rock about a meter high, probably a stone altar or boulder, on which they discovered pine torches and drops of blood (Thompson 1938:594). Local Mayas organized pilgrimages to burn offerings, including blood from fowls or people, to tutelary deities on the mountain summit, and the Manche-Ch'ol must have arrived at this shrine to pray and give sacrifices to the mountain. The other Manche-Ch'ol ritual mountain was called Xcarrauchan (also Escurruchan in documents; Stone 1932:257), or possibly Ixkarauchan or Ixkalauchan. The prefix *Ix* in the name emphasizes the mountain's feminine

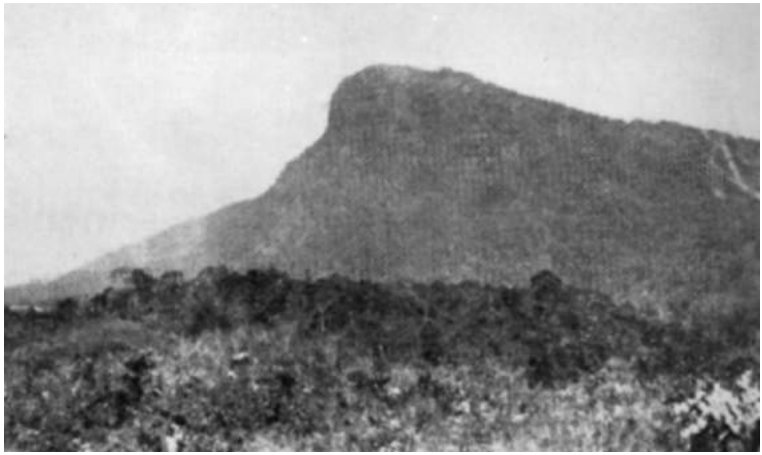

Figure 6.2. Curved mountain that resembles depictions of Culhuacan in Mexican codices, near the Jatate River, Chiapas, Mexico (after Palacios 1928:150, fig. 108).

attributes. This mountain was found near the Maytol River adjacent to the community of San Lucas Tzalac. Local Mayas called this mountain the "god of the mountains" (Thompson 1938:594). On the summit the Maya constructed a small plaza that was well swept, and they surrounded it with a palisade where a ceremonial fire always burned. Maya travelers kept the fire ablaze in order to burn copal offerings when they arrived at the shrine. Local, unconverted Maya did not approve of the Spanish trespassing on the mountain, since they felt unbelievers should not be allowed in the abode of their gods (Stone 1932:258). Spanish priests realized the religious importance of this mountain for the Manche-Ch'ol Maya; thus, they placed a large cross on it (Stone 1932:258). This mountain may have been a "mountain full of boulders" called Xeuluchan, meaning "Seats of Snakes" (Feldman 2000:24). The reference to snakes may indicate that snakes rested on the boulders or that these rocks or caves on the mountain were homes to divine serpents. Regardless, a Spanish priest mentioned that in the passage through the boulders, the "demons [oracles] spoke [to Maya people] and advised those that passed to the other side" (Feldman 2000:24).

The Ch'olti'-Lacandon Maya also constructed a remote temple in the forest filled with images of their gods, most of which were mountain deities (Comparato 1984:13–15). This secluded structure, kept well hidden, was important for community and nobles' rites in the forest, was a destination

for Maya pilgrims, and may have been located at a mountain or a spring. Forests, rivers, and mountains were significant ritual places at a regional level: one Spanish explorer asked an aged Ch'olti'-Lacandon informant to map out significant places in the area, and the man described the "mouths of rivers, rocks, hills, and resting places" (Caso Barerra and Aliphat Fernández 2006:33). Moreover, the Ch'olti'-Lacandon made ritual journeys and trading expeditions to the neighboring Acala Ch'ol Maya province to the east of their territory. Here they visited Bolonwitz (Nolonteviz, Volonwitz, or Bolonpel Uitz; Dillon 1977:7–9; Stone 1932:247), or "Nine Hills," and their resident gods, in addition to the well-known salt deposits at the place called Salinas de los Nueve Cerros (see Feldman 2000:44, map 1). The Ch'olti'-Lacandon Maya controlled the salt deposits, settlements, and mountain and cave shrines there (recent surveys discovered handprints in some of these caves; Schwab et al. 2012) until the Itzaj Maya took them by force. The history of this site exemplifies the connections between politics, economics, territory, and ritual associated with Maya pilgrimage.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF MAYA RITUAL MOUNTAINS

The ancient Maya in the study region attributed great religious importance to mountains. Specific mountains held special meaning for Maya people, and they named their cities, polities, provinces, and ritual places after them (Stuart and Houston 1994). Mountains were significant places for Maya people since they rise into the sky—another important Maya spiritual realm. Thus, mountains were associated with both earth and sky in addition to their respective resident spiritual essences. The word *witz* (mountain) in Mayan languages frequently appears in Classic Maya texts naming these common ritual landscapes. Mountains can be identified in Maya art as large altar- or throne-like designs with earth and stone markings, the so-called *cauac* and *caban* signs. These icons may signify exposed bedrock in addition to the large cracks or depressions seen in mountains. Maya rulers are frequently shown standing, sitting, and performing rituals on mountains or their symbolic counterparts (fig. 6.3), which include stone altars, worked boulders, and temples. Dressed as warriors in the rites on mountains, rulers seek protection and success in battle from the resident spiritual forces.

In the carved limestone panels of Palenque, rulers performing rituals stand on mountains, possibly the mountains surrounding the site itself or perhaps

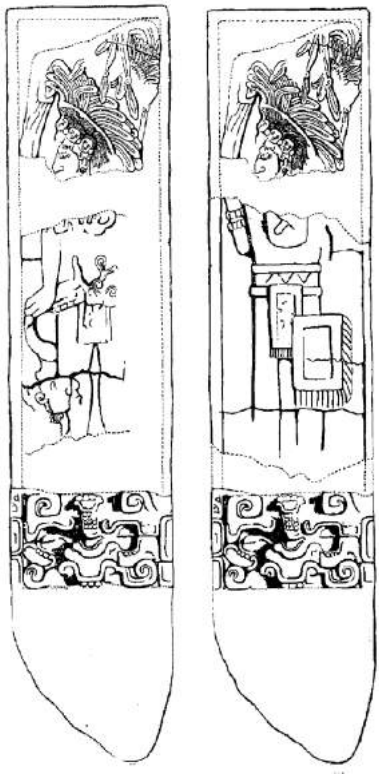

Figure 6.3. Stela showing Maya lords standing on a mountain, temple, or stone altar from Santa Elena Poco Uinic, Chiapas, Mexico (after Palacios 1928:121, figs. 82 and 83).

the site's pyramids or stone altars. On one panel from the Temple of the Foliated Cross, the ruler K'inich Kan Bahlam stands on an animate mountain with an inscription naming it as a mountain of sustenance, Yaxnal Witznal (Stuart and Stuart 2008:199–209). This place may be the mountain El Mirador nearby or the Temple of the Foliated Cross itself. The imagery on the panel connects the power of the Palenque kings with the creation of life and the maintenance of the world order in their kingdom through rituals in the landscape. The presence of a temple on the summit of El Mirador demonstrates the importance of elite Maya rituals on these prominent geographical features (Barnhart 2007:114; Stuart and Stuart 2008:21). Archaeologists did not map terraces or steps up the hill to this temple. However, a level area on the south side of the mountain could have been modified by the Maya to allow access to the summit, or it could have served as a plaza. A long platform on the south side of the temple served as a walkway leading to its entrance. The construction looks like the pilgrims' way on the summit of Mount Tlaloc in central Mexico

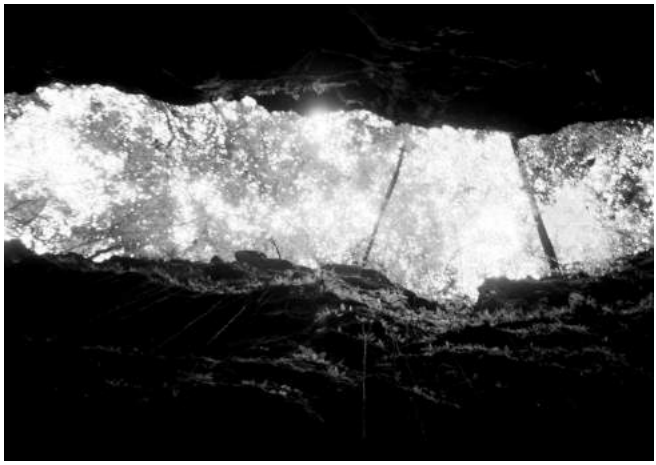

Figure 6.4. Cliffs at the split mountain of Aguateca, Petén, Guatemala.

(Townsend 1992). Yet another hill in Palenque inscriptions is Yemal K'uk' Witz, or "Descending Quetzal Mountain," which may have been another ritual hill. The Ch'ol Maya call high mountains *k'uk' witz*, meaning "quetzal mountain," since quetzal birds thrive in the high mountain forests (Bassie-Sweet et al. 2011). Alternatively, the place-name may refer to a mountain in Chiapas where quetzal birds were once found or where they descended during the mating season. At this time these birds could be trapped for their economically and ritually important green feathers.

The Maya created sites on hills for combined defensive and ritual purposes, like the site of Aguateca, Petén, built along a deep chasm on a hill near Lake Petexbatun (fig. 6.4). Aguateca had special religious significance since it is associated with a hill with cliffs, an immense opening in the earth, springs, and the lake (Inomata and Triadan 2010). Offerings dating from the Preclassic to Classic times have been recovered within the chasm (see chapter 4). In Maya texts, the hieroglyphic place-name for Aguateca is a mountain sign (witz) with a fissure that has wind escaping from it. The glyph refers to the chasm at Aguateca from which cool air flows. The Aguateca place sign is also prefixed with the "sun/heat-faced" glyph (*k'inich*; Stuart and Houston 1994:9–12), which may refer to the limestone cliffs that face the rising sun. Aguateca consists of a ritual center complete with ceremonial plazas, temples, and carved stone stelae (Inomata 2007). This and other sites in the southern Maya lowlands and their dynasties were

associated with local patron deities, possibly lineage gods, who oversaw Maya rituals (Houston and Stuart 1996; Stuart and Houston 1994:8). Rituals at Aguateca involved dance, music, bloodletting, and probably sacrifice, in addition to the placing of ceremonial offerings in the hill's fissure (Ishihara 2009). The Maya inhabitants of Aguateca constructed walls to protect the ceremonial precinct at the time of the dynasty's political collapse. It is likely that the defenders sought the protection and intervention of the ancestral deities associated with the hill during times of conflict.

The ancient Maya also constructed temples associated with ritual mountains at Raxruha Viejo en Alta Verapaz, Guatemala (Demarest et al. 2008; Woodfill 2010:90–95). This site is found near the upper Pasión River region in Petén, which was the heart of Manche-Ch'ol Maya territory in the colonial period. This site is located only five kilometers from the Candelaria Caves, which contained major Classic Maya pilgrimage shrines filled with ritual objects, including ceramic vessels, obsidian blades, exotic trade goods, and human burials (Woodfill 2010:28–76). No signs of habitation were found in these caves. The ancient Maya in this region acknowledged the importance of hills for community rituals and identity by constructing temples and altars in front of them. At Raxruha Viejo, they built large platforms at the bases of pyramidal mountains to effectively create an impressive temple complex (Demarest et al. 2008; Woodfill 2010:93–95). The long platforms at the bases of the hills may have acted as walkways and places for pilgrimage ritual. Furthermore, the palace complex at Raxruha Viejo was placed next to the opening of a small cave in the side of a hill (Woodfill 2010:93). The Maya built the primary temple of this site into a mountain and then placed a row of plain monolithic stelae and altars nearby (Demarest et al. 2008:192; Woodfill 2010:93). The mountains at Raxruha Viejo probably attracted Maya pilgrims from other areas, as did the ritual caves. By constructing their ceremonial architecture near mountains and carrying out rituals in caves, ancient Maya people maintained contact with deities in these ritual landscapes and reinforced their community identity.

Mountains in Ancient Maya Pilgrimage

Maya pilgrimage and community ceremonies at ritual mountains have ancient analogues. An early pilgrimage site in the Southern Maya Region is the impressive Mirador Mountain at Lake Mensabak (fig. 6.5). Constructions on the mountain date to the Late Preclassic period, but they were used later

Figure 6.5. Mirador Mountain on an island in Lake Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico.

by Postclassic, historic, and ethnographic Maya peoples (Palka and Sánchez Balderas 2012). Mirador Mountain exhibits a sheer limestone cliff on its east side that rises some one hundred meters out of the lake (fig. 6.6). This limestone cliff with clefts in the rock facing the rising sun attracted the attention of Maya religious specialists, and this mountain and its cliff are so high that they dominate vistas from every direction. Local Lacandon people call this mountain Chak Aktun (Red Hollow Mountain/Cave) because of the natural red pigment on the cliff face. This color is ritually important for Lacandon Maya, and it is the color most pleasing to the gods (McGee 1990). Red is also associated with the east and the rising sun in Maya cultures. Local Lacandon people state that Chak Aktun is a deity, possibly referring to the mountain as a spiritual essence or an earth god. Additionally, *aktun* (also spelled *aak'tuun*) refers to homes of earth gods, usually hills with caves, in Lacandon and Yucatec Mayan (Boremanse 1998b:201). The Yucatec term *aktun* denotes caves and stone buildings (Brady and Colas 2005:161), with *ak* referring alternatively to a "turtle shell" or to "hollow objects and enclosed spaces," including cenotes, caves, houses, temples, and churches (Clendinnen 1980:381–82). These hollow spaces contain food, water, and other things people need. In

Figure 6.6. East side of Mirador Mountain, Lake Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico. Note the canoe near the base, clefts in the cliff resembling a handprint, and the leveled summit and temple superstructure.

Yucatec Mayan, *aktun* also means "[dry] cave," and the term is linked to the ritual nature of caves as places to communicate with spiritual forces associated with tortoises and their shells (Astor-Aguilera 2010:119–20). Lacandon informants state that the splits in the Mirador cliff represent the monumental handprint of the resident god or a huge mythical crocodile that emerged from the lake. Other Lacandon people remark that the clefts were left by a meteor strike during a conflict with the god Mensabak, who lives in a cliff across the lake. The location of this mountain on an island, its cliff with red pigmentation and cosmic connotations, and its association with caves have made Mirador Mountain an important ritual place (see fig. 1.2). Of further significance is the fact that the mountain is occasionally covered in mist, giving the impression that it generates moisture.

The extraordinary attributes of Mirador Mountain have drawn Maya pilgrims for centuries. People on the summit can see other hills, rivers, and lakes for miles. They feel the constant wind, hear sounds emanating from distant areas, and experience cooler temperatures. Importantly, a large

Figure 6.7. Cave (#4) on the north side of Mirador Mountain, Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico.

vertical cave entrance expelling cool air is found on the summit. This cave was the focus of ceremonies in which Maya religious specialists deposited ceramic offerings in Late Preclassic and Late Postclassic times. Cave entrances that were the loci for rituals are found on the slopes of the mountain as well (fig. 6.7). Some caves contain Late Postclassic to historic burials and accompanying ceramic vessel offerings. Additionally, two large sinkholes (cenotes) that fill with water during the rainy season are located on the west side of the mountain (fig. 6.8), and one exhibits a single square ritual structure on its edge. The large size of the blocks in this shrine hints at a Late Preclassic date like that of the temple on the summit. The association of this tall mountain with water symbolically connects it to both the underworld and the heavens. This mountain on an island within a valley surrounded by hills represents the quintessential Mesoamerican place of creation and worship: the altepetl, or "water mountain," an important religious and political symbol for Mesoamerican communities. García-Zambrano (1994) analyzes the symbolic landscapes of Mesoamerica and finds that native people

Figure 6.8. Cenote and cliff on the west side of Mirador Mountain, Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico.

typically search for a place of mythical time when the earth and cosmos were created. This place consists of an aquatic universe with a mountain full of caves and springs at the center. The mountain represents the moment of creation when the waters and the sky separated and the earth became elevated. The Mirador Mountain at Lake Mensabak, possibly a feminine mountain with fertility connotations, fits this notion of sacred place perfectly.

I would also like to point out that an important ceremonial construction rests on the summit of Mirador Mountain (fig. 6.9). Ancient stone temples, or tunich (also *otoch tunich*, "house of stone"), for the Lacandon Maya (the term also is applied to caves) are homes of celestial gods who live in ruins (Boremanse 1998b:201; see fig. 1.6). While the temple was obviously associated with rituals at the vertical cave entrance to the south, the orientation of the temple remained a mystery until recently. The Maya oriented the axial line of the structure not to the cardinal points, as typically was done by builders at other sites, but to about thirty-five degrees east of north. On the north side of the mountain we recently discovered another large cave that faces the rising sun and has a ceremonial terrace construction at its entrance, in addition to a plaza constructed around a large boulder. A line drawn from this boulder to the cave on the summit forms an axis through the temple on the mountain summit. The Maya dedicated the temple to the large caves and boulders on the Mirador hill and the supernatural entities associated with

Figure 6.9. Late Preclassic Temple (Str. 1) on the summit of Mirador Mountain, Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico (terrace height approximately 1.75 meters).

them. The structures of the contemporaneous site of Noh Kuh found to the southeast across the lake have a similarly skewed orientation, and they appear to be aligned with the Mirador Mountain.

Excavations on the summit of Mirador Mountain have shown that the area is largely clear of artifacts (Deeb et al. 2011), and few items were recovered from inside the cave on the summit. The relatively low frequencies of artifacts may indicate that the Maya left perishable offerings or very few offerings in general. They frequently swept the area to keep it clean and "ordered," as noted earlier in ethnographic and historic sources. The ceramics on the summit consist of fragments of Late Preclassic and Late Postclassic serving bowls and plates. Additionally, whole Late Preclassic bowls were noted at the bases of ritual cliffs near the summit. These vessels likely contained offerings for spiritual essences residing in the mountain and cliffs. Local Lacandon men state that a stone corn grinder and its hand stone rest in one of the deep caves in the mountain. A ceramic effigy incense burner that appears to date to the Late Preclassic period was also recovered in a small cave on the summit (fig. 6.10). This vessel may depict a deity living in the mountain, perhaps a long-nosed rain or wind god. Excavations near a small platform (Str. 4) on the east side of the plaza yielded a concentration of ceramic bowl and plate fragments, which may indicate the preparation of food and offerings here. Interestingly, two tiny identical stone figurines with

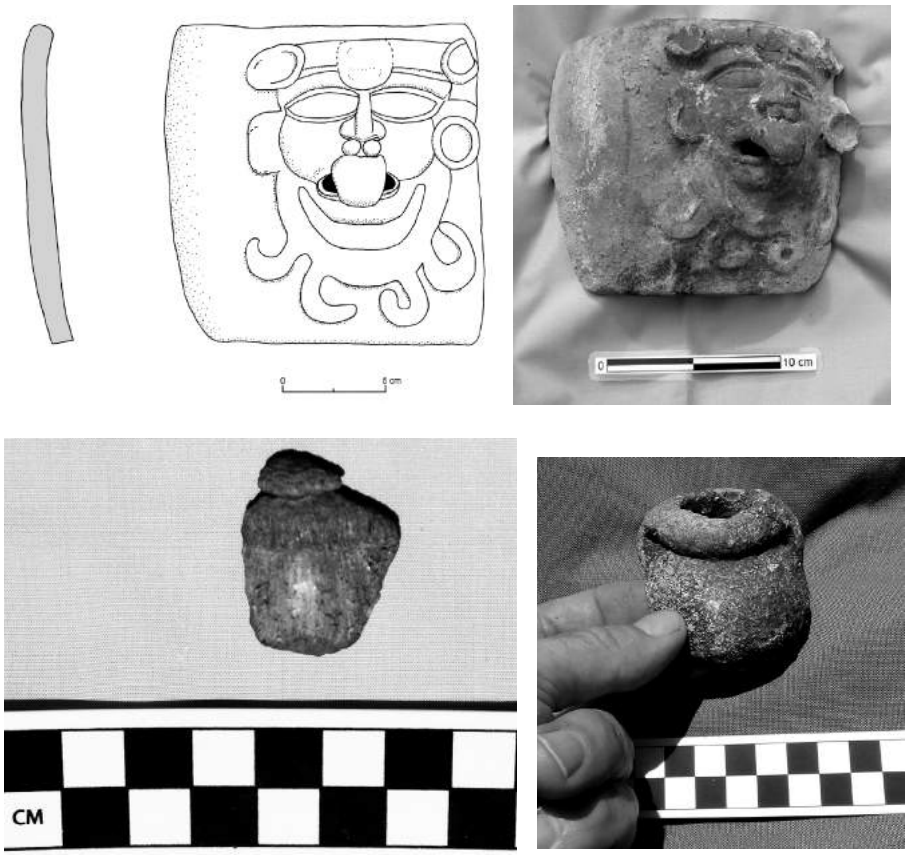

Figure 6.10. Late Preclassic ceramic incense burner and miniature abstract anthropomorphic figurine in quartzite from the summit of Mirador Mountain, and small ceramic flask from Ixtabay at the mountain's base, Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico.

anthropomorphic shapes, which may have been a specific class of pilgrim votive offering, were found in this same deposit (fig. 6.10). These simple stone figurines—one in limestone and the other in quartzite—are similar to Maya pilgrim offerings from the Cueva de los Andasolos near Chinkultic, Chiapas (Navarrete and Martinez 1977:figs. 12–16).

Not obvious from a distance are the extensive modifications to the topography of Mirador Mountain, particularly on the summit and north slope. The Maya built on its west side as well, including terraces, walls, and other structures, and essentially fashioned Mirador Mountain into an immense temple. First they leveled the summit to make a plaza in the Late

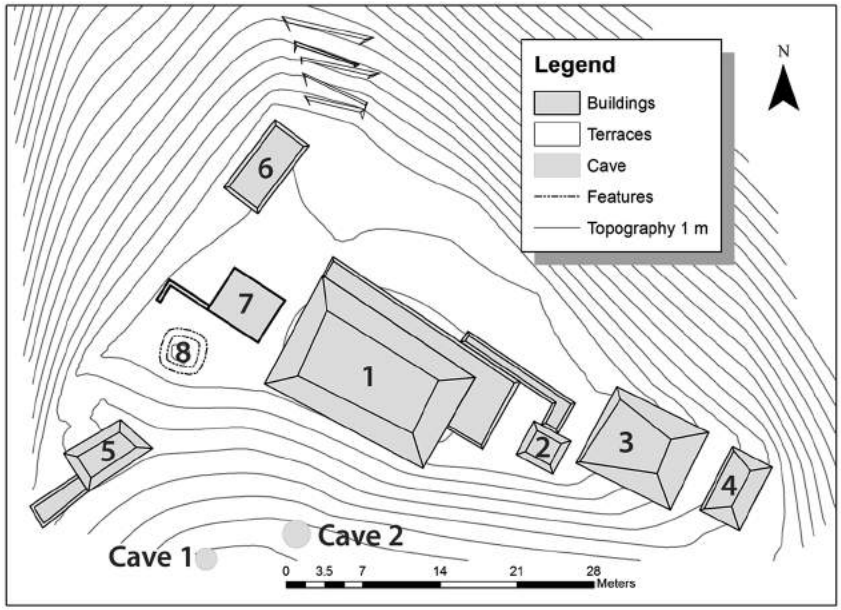

Figure 6.11. Late Preclassic Maya ceremonial constructions on the leveled summit of Mirador Mountain, Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico. Note temple (Str. 1), cave entrances, and steps descending to terraces (center, top) (map by Rebecca Deeb, Chris Hernández, and Santiago Júarez).

Preclassic period (fig. 6.11), which can be seen from the surrounding area. The Maya removed bedrock and earth from the peak and used the material to construct the plaza floor and the temple near the cave. The Maya then constructed a series of large terraces, thirteen in total, from the base of Mirador Mountain to the summit (fig. 6.12). The summit was then reutilized for ceremonies by Late Postclassic Maya pilgrims and then by modern Lacandon Mayas. Intriguingly, Blom and La Farge (1926:252) report an artificially terraced mountain in nearby Ocosingo, Chiapas, that also has thirteen terraces and a shrine on its summit (fig. 6.13). Additionally, Palacios (1928:59–70) reports mountains with modifications, such as terraces, ramps, stairs, and shrines on their summits, near the ruins of Chinkultic in eastern Chiapas.

The terraces on Mirador Mountain, which were built at the same time as the constructions on the summit, have round shapes symbolically important as sacred enclosures in Maya culture. Some terraces have more than ten meters of construction fill. Most are built of rough stone and earth and do

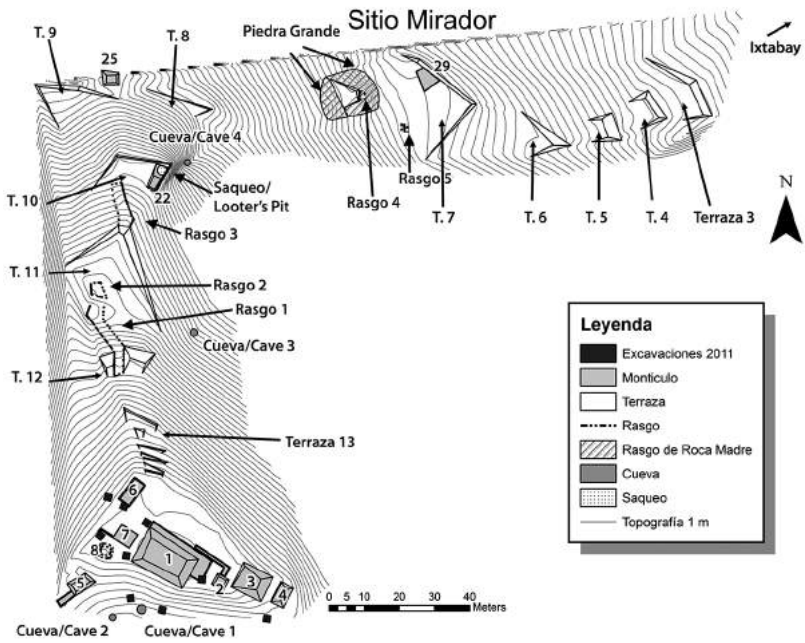

Figure 6.12. Terraces on the north side of Mirador Mountain, Chiapas, Mexico. Note the large boulders (rock features 2 and 4) and caves (map by Chris Hernández and Rebecca Deeb).

not support constructions. However, many terraces are associated with significant natural features on the mountain, such as large boulders and cave entrances. The path of the terraces winds up and down the mountain like a snake, described earlier as a pilgrim's path (see also fig. 4.13). The ancient Maya metaphorically connected meandering paths with snakes, and contemporary Mayas speak of giant snakes traveling on mountains (Méndez Guzmán 1998:376; Wisdom 1940:394–95). The thirteen terraces may symbolize the upper worlds, or compartments, of the Maya cosmos or thirteen gods as seen in the ethnographic descriptions. The Lacandon Maya also believe that the celestial realms belong to thirteen gods, each with their own houses (Petryshyn 1968:fig. 2). The Q'eqchi' Maya state that there exist thirteen spiritual essences in the natural world who live in thirteen ritual caves in mountains (Adams and Brady 1994). These gods are the lords of the mountains, and they are the owners of everything. In this light, the thirteen terraces on

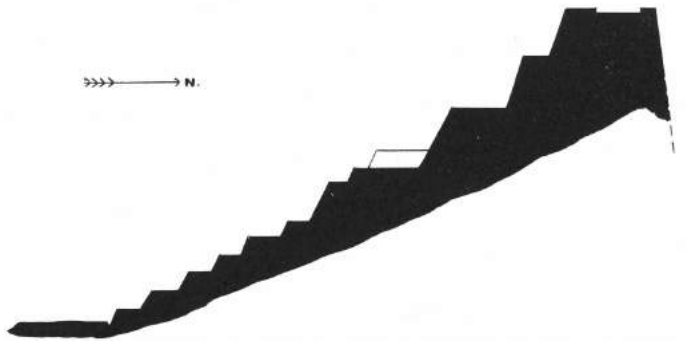

Figure 6.13. Modified hill with thirteen terraces and leveled summit, Ocosingo, Chiapas, Mexico (after Blom and La Farge 1926:252, fig. 201).

Mirador Mountain can be interpreted as homes of spiritual forces who received offerings at their terrace abodes. The terraces also structured the travel of Maya pilgrims. It is conceivable that their movement along these terraces mimicked the daily path of the sun through the thirteen realms of the overworld.

It is important to note that the terraces begin at the site called Ixtabay at the base of the north slope of Mirador Mountain (fig. 6.14). Ixtabay consists of plazas, long platforms, tall temples, and canoe landings where pilgrims arrived to ascend the mountain. The function of Ixtabay as a pilgrimage site is demonstrated by the presence of ceremonial architecture, several plazas, and a dearth of habitation platforms. Maya elites created the ceremonial constructions, and they led rituals on the terraces, at the caves and boulders, and on the summit. In the plazas Maya pilgrims gathered to perform ceremonies and await the moment to ascend the terraces to the temple on the summit. A tall mound rests on the east side of the first terrace and overlooks the lake, and a small rectangular altar can also be seen near the middle of this terrace. These constructions likely served in the initial rituals during the pilgrims' journey west up the mountain. The seventh terrace exhibits one of the most dramatic ritual spaces on Mirador Mountain. This terrace, which forms a large circular plaza, is about fifty meters long, fifteen meters wide, and about ten meters high. When people reached the terrace, they were confronted with an extremely large boulder on its plaza surface (fig. 6.15). Ceremonies were conducted in the plaza around the boulder and were seen by hundreds of people. The Maya

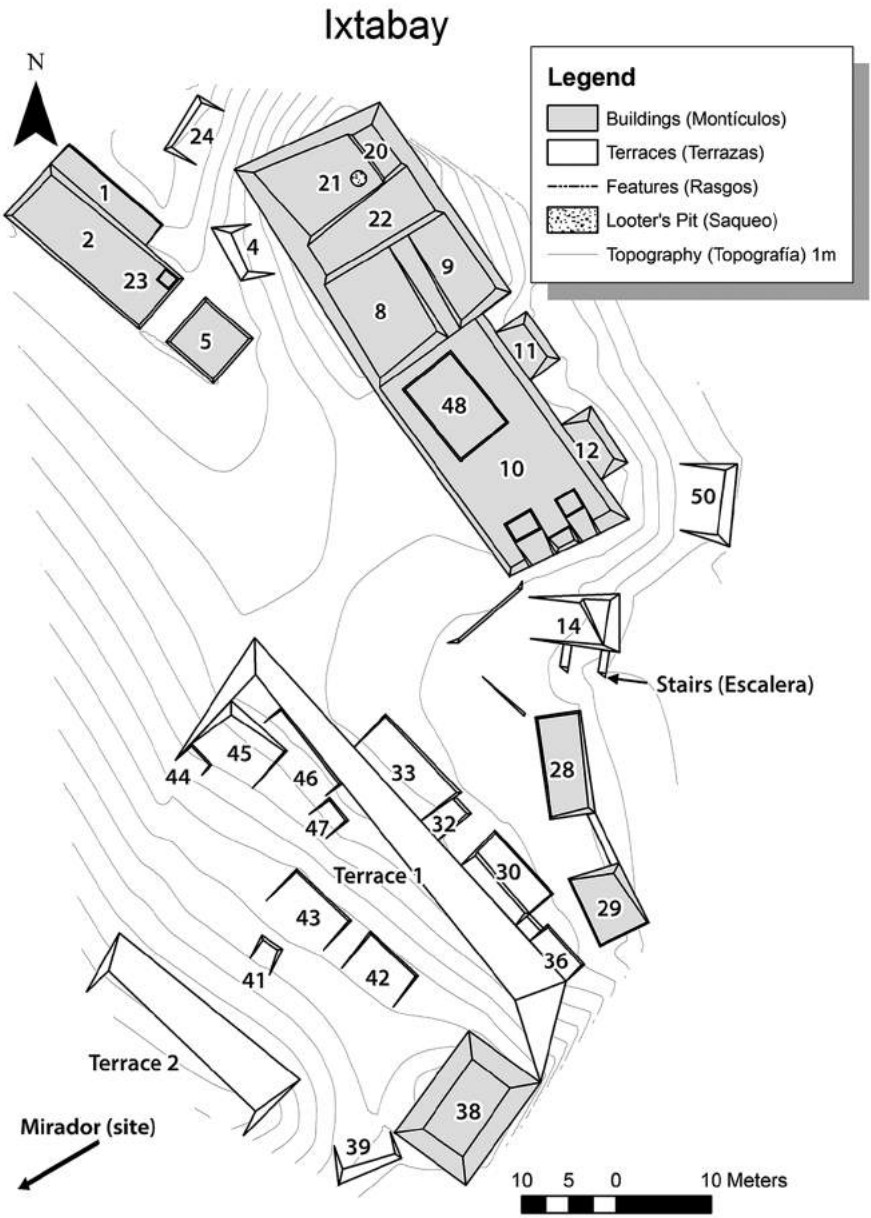

Figure 6.14. Lower two terraces at Ixtabay at the base of Mirador Mountain, Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico. Note the plazas, temple mounds, and canoe landings at Strs. 14 and 24 (map by Chris Hernández and Rebecca Deeb).

Figure 6.15. Large boulder on Terrace #7 of Mirador Mountain, Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico (man is for scale).

constructed a small platform connecting the top of the boulder with the hill slope. They also built a low platform (Str. 29) in front of the boulder that served as an altar. Maya pilgrims performed ceremonies and left offerings at this boulder for the deities residing in it or for the ancestors it represented, as suggested by comparative Maya ethnographies.

To the east of the boulder, a ramp led people up to a cliff with a cave. Their travel in a westward direction up the ramp may have symbolized the path of the setting sun, which Mayas believe entered the underworld through a cave. The Maya constructed a narrow platform in front of this cave on which to perform rituals, thus restricting involvement in the ceremonies to a few people. Ceramic sherds at the entrance date to Late Preclassic and Late Postclassic times, but no ceramics were recovered in the cave by spelunkers. The ramp and platform probably date to the Late Preclassic period, like the temple on the summit and the plaza with the boulder. Another terrace was built above the cave along with a small rectangular building, probably an altar (Str. 22). At the terrace above the cave, the pilgrims' path changes direction and heads south up the mountain to the sanctuary on the summit. The ninth terrace

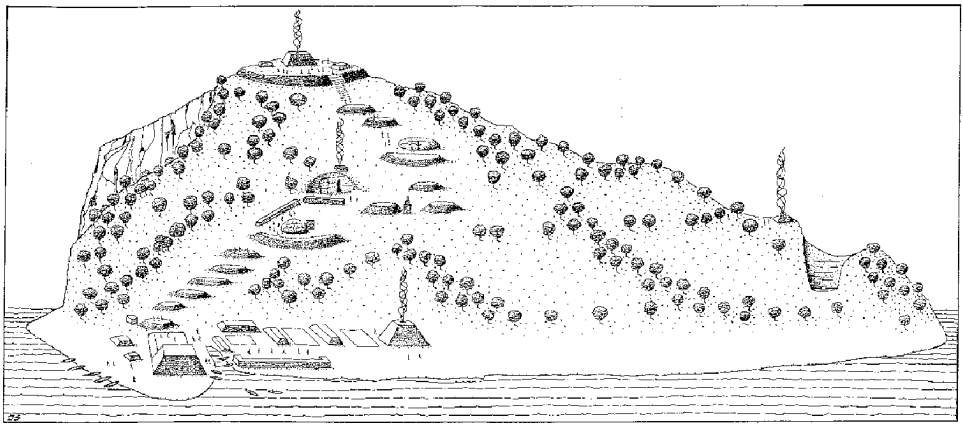

Figure 6.16. Reconstruction of Mirador Mountain (north side) pilgrimage plazas, shrines, and terraces, Lake Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico (drawing by Jack Scott).

supports a small building or lookout (Str. 25) that faces a cliff shrine (the house of the Lacandon god Mensabak, see following) that contains rock art, exposed human bone, and Lacandon incense burners. The eleventh terrace served as a ceremonial plaza for people to gather around another impressive boulder. This terrace measures around thirty meters long and eight meters wide and has at least ten meters of fill. The terrace covers part of the boulder, allowing the Maya to perform rituals on top of it. To the side of the large exposed rock on the west side of the terrace a small cave entrance can be found. The Maya fashioned a small altar of stone blocks above this cave entrance. Still another cave, in this case a vertical shaft, can be seen off the east side of the terrace. This entrance was delineated by a wall made of large chunks of limestone. Maya pilgrims performed rituals at the caves; however, they were devoid of artifacts, except for a few Late Preclassic and Late Postclassic Maya ceramic sherds. This finding suggests that the worshipers cleaned the shrines or gave perishable offerings.

Based on ethnographic evidence, Mirador Mountain was a "mountain of abundance" for the ancient Maya in the Mensabak region (fig. 6.16). The mountain's many caves and deity houses stored everything that people needed, especially water. Maya pilgrims arrived at the mountain shrines to communicate with ancestral deities and the owners of the mountains so that they would release water, food, and energies for the health and fertility of their communities. Traveling to the mountain and moving on the terraces provided a unique experience for the pilgrims, allowing them to attain

cosmic balance and achieve their religious goals. Mirador Mountain was a key symbol for the Maya at Mensabak, an altepetl representing the origins and continuity of their community, which explains why the center of Noh K'uh was oriented toward the mountain. Maya elites constructed the mountain's shrines to demonstrate their ability to access resident spiritual forces and thus maintain world order. Pilgrimages were carried out to Mirador Mountain at the very end of the Late Preclassic Maya civilization, right before its collapse, and then again at the time of the Spanish conquest, both periods of great stress. Therefore, rituals at the ancestral mountain were directed toward obtaining balance in a changing world for everyone's benefit. While the focus of rituals for water, fertility, and cosmic balance was on Mirador Mountain in the Late Preclassic period, Late Postclassic and historic Maya pilgrims visited cliff shrines around the lake to conduct ceremonies at these portals to the land of the dead and the otherworldly paradise.

RITUAL CLIFFS IN MAYA ETHNOGRAPHY

Cliffs as ritual landscapes have not been widely studied in the Maya region; thus, we have comparatively little ethnographic and historic information on them. Cliffs are similar to mountains as ceremonial places, and the two have often been conflated by researchers. However, significant differences exist between these two ritual places, mainly because cliffs frequently contain rock art. Highly visible cliffs are seen by the Maya as doors to the houses of the gods. And cliffs are found everywhere, making them recognizable ritual places for Maya people past and present. Contemporary Lacandon Mayas, for instance, state that certain cliffs are homes of specific gods. Indeed, most cliffs at Lake Mensabak are the abodes of Lacandon deities, such as the ritual cliff, cave, and rock-shelter that is the home of the god Mensabak (fig. 6.17). Another cliff that separates the Chocolja and La Arena Rivers in Chiapas is the home of Kanank'ash, "Protector/Guardian of the Forest" (Soustelle 1970:33). The Lacandon believe that the forests near this cliff belong to Kanank'ash and that they cannot cut vegetation there.

Petryshyn (2005) went on a pilgrimage to Lake Mensabak with Lacandon men from Naha in 1968, as did Soustelle (1970:27–28) in the 1930s. The pilgrims made a twelve-hour trek through the forest, which is longer than necessary to walk the distance between the two lakes. The pilgrims passed the time talking, exploring, and hunting. The group arrived at the cave and cliff shrines at Lake

Figure 6.17. Cliff shrine for the Lacandon Maya god Mensabak with rock art panels, Lake Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico.

Mensabak, which were seen as the homes of the gods (see fig. 3.6). A main cliff shrine with altars, exposed burials, numerous Lacandon incense burners, and rock art belongs to Mensabak, who is an important god of the earth connected to success in hunting (Petryshyn 2005:330–31). Mensabak is also feared, for this entity can bring too much rainfall (Soustelle 1970:27–28). Another cliff rising out of the lake with rock paintings is the home of Tzibana, who is the constructor and painter of gods' homes and the god of art and stone monuments and who is requested during heavy rains to bring better weather (Petryshyn 2005:330). The Lacandon pilgrims completed a ceremonial circuit by canoe to the different shrines at Lake Mensabak. The shrines, most of which were caves in cliffs or rock-shelters, contained abundant evidence of rituals, including human burials (skulls without cranial shaping of recent date; Petryshyn 2005:333), ceramic vessels and incensarios, soot on the shrine walls, and boards to hold balls of copal incense for ceremonies. The shrines were hidden by Lacandon religious specialists since foreigners could endanger the efficacy of the rites (Petryshyn 2005:332–34; Soustelle 1970:28). At the shrines, Lacandon men burned incense in ceramic god pots, prayed, sang, and passed wrapped palm leaves through the smoke (Petryshyn 2005:333–34). They probably passed

the palm fronds over people back home to cleanse them and keep them healthy. The Lacandon men requested that the gods accept their offerings and protect their fields from too much rainfall so that they could continue to bring food offerings to the gods (Petryshyn 2005:334; Soustelle 1970:27).

Across the border in Petén, *Chaltunha'* was an important Itzaj Maya place-name on Lake Peten Itza (Schumann 1971:9). The term signifies "Limestone Rock in the Water," and it names a cliff at the end of the Tayasal Peninsula near a small island called Lep'eet (Tesucún Chan and Tesucún 1999:45). The prominence of this name in historic documents may indicate that this cliff had ceremonial functions. This type of ritual landscape with a cliff emerging from water is common in the study area. Another example of a cliff linked with water is at Naha, which Lacandon ritual practitioners visited to burn incense for resident gods. I recently visited this shrine with local Lacandon people. We followed a dry stream bed, which fills during the rains and flows from the hill, perhaps from a seasonal spring. At the summit of the mountain above the stream bed, we encountered a cliff with a deep vertical crack in its base. This shrine is found on one of the tallest mountains near the community. Our Lacandon guides explained that the shrine is the home of Kanank'ash, the lord of the forest and its resources. Lacandon religious specialists placed ceramic incense burners along the base of the cliff to give offerings to this god.

For additional examples, we have studied rituals of contemporary Tzeltal Mayas living near Mensabak, who visit cliff shrines and outcrops of bedrock (see fig. 1.13). The ritual cliffs of this Tzeltal population are located near ritual mountains, and they are used for annual rain-making ceremonies (Josuhé Lozada, personal communication, 2012). Tzeltal Mayas travel to ritual landscapes to witness male household heads offering meat, rum, and cigarettes to spiritual forces associated with the earth and rain (fig. 6.18). At the cliffs they petition for the continued flow of springs and rivers and rain for their crops, but not too much rain, they stress, or their fields and settlements will flood. Musicians accompany the pilgrims, and they play music to please the divine forces. Women accompany the men to witness the rites, and they assist in the preparation of the offerings.

The Ch'ol Maya of Tumbala believe that a cliff near a river marks the location where the essences of their people originated (Pitarch Ramón 1996:43). They say that one can hear the cries of their children in the cliff at night. The connection between cliffs and the souls of ancestors helps explain the presence of human burials in caves and rock-shelters associated with

Figure 6.18. Tzeltal Maya rain ritual at a cliff shrine in the Mensabak region, Chiapas, Mexico. Note offerings and musicians (photograph courtesy of Josuhé Lozada).

cliffs over the last five hundred years in the study region (see following). Another example of ritual cliffs in Chiapas is a specific shrine that is important for Tzotzil ceremonies: K'ut Ton, or "Rock on the Side of a Cliff," which consists of a cliff with a prominent rock and spring at its base (Vogt 1993:111). The Tzotzil also make pilgrimages to ravines, cliffs, and mountain passes (*hap osil*) on the boundaries of the town of Zinacantan to perform ceremonies during year-renewal rituals (Vogt 1993:183–85). One shrine may be seen on the side of a hill called Nakleb Ok (Snapping Turtle House), which is the reception area of the home of a male ancestral god. Another exposed hillside is called K'ul Ton, or "Holy Rock," and is the doorway to the home of another male ancestral god (Vogt 1993:184). The Tzotzil Maya near Chenalho provide offerings to gods on a steep ridge behind a Protestant church so that the divine forces will protect people from illness. They also ask for rain and health for their crops in addition to asking that the Protestants be punished for abandoning their traditional religion and ruining their crops (Lee 1972:16). Clearly, cliff shrines surrounding Maya towns are important for community prosperity and protection, in addition to the maintenance of boundaries.

Figure 6.19. San Diego cliff carving showing Maya noble walking to or arriving at a ritual place or cave, Petén, Guatemala (drawing by Linda Schele [image number 7319], © David Schele, courtesy of the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc., www.famsi.org).

ANCIENT MAYA RITUALS AT CLIFFS

The San Diego cliff is a prime example of a carved ancient Maya ritual cliff (fig. 6.19), which is found at Lake San Diego in western Petén near Lake Mendoza. This low-relief carving of an early Maya lord can be viewed on the flat surface of a high limestone cliff (Schele and Freidel 1990:87–88; Stone 2003:126; Stuart 2010:287). The carving style and hieroglyphic dates on the

Figure 6.20. Rock art on a cliff, Lake Miramar, Chiapas, Mexico (drawing by Paulina Makuch after Rivero Torres 1992:fig. 8).

two-meter-long image place it in the Late Preclassic period, making it contemporaneous with Maya temple constructions on islands in Lake Mendoza (Palka et al. 2007) and Lake Mensabak. In the San Diego cliff image a Maya noble stands on a toponymic register that represents ritual locations (Stuart and Houston 1994:67–68). The hieroglyph directly under the noble's feet refers to a cave, or a portal, with a bat's head sign, which may be the name of this cliff. The noble is dressed in rich attire, and he carries an object in his right hand that may be a ceremonial bundle or offering vessel. This image recalls the Loltun Cave image (see fig. 2.25) and Olmec rock and cave art showing figures, perhaps pilgrims, walking while carrying objects (see fig. 4.26). The noble possibly made a pilgrimage to the cliff, and Maya carvers recorded the event. Images of a large feline, possibly a jaguar, and a deer were carved above the noble's head. The presence of these animals could indicate that the master of animals, a deity who releases animals to humans, resides in the cliff. The glyphs may state that the noble is from Yaxchilan, located just to the west (Lopes and Davletshin 2004:1). Furthermore, the place-name *Yaxha*, or "Green/Great Water," in the text perhaps refers to the site of Yaxha found to the east or to Lake San Diego itself.

Archaeologists recorded additional carvings and paintings on ritual cliffs at Lake Miramar, Chiapas (fig. 6.20). On a high cliff that rises out of the west side of the lake, a three-dimensional human figure stands in a niche that represents a cave or the cliff itself (Pincemin Deliberos 1999:74, 80; Rivero

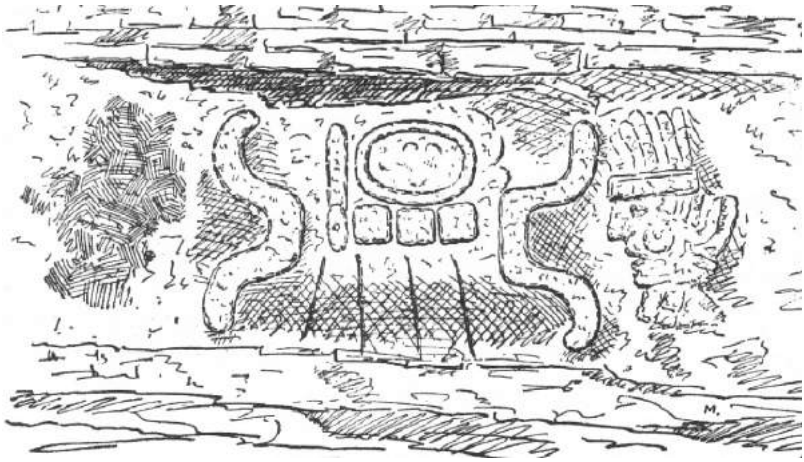

Figure 6.21. Maya cliff carving with a turtle shell design, possibly referring to the cliff itself, Piedras Negras, Petén, Guatemala (after Maler 1901:42).

Torres 1992:29). Painted designs found on a cliff on the northeast side of the lake include handprints, animal heads formed by negative handprints, stars, and open-ring shapes (Pincemin Deliberos 1999:83, 88; Rivero Torres 1992:45). Cave shrines within the cliffs were visited by Postclassic Maya pilgrims, who deposited numerous human bones and skulls during ceremonies for ancestors and the renewal of human essences (Blom 1954). Unfortunately, it is difficult to date the art on the Lake Miramar cliffs. While the carved human figure can be likened to Preclassic Olmec rock art (see Pincemin Deliberos 1999 for examples), its cultural affiliation remains uncertain. A Middle Preclassic date for this design is possible since archaeologists recovered Mamom pottery (ca. 800–400 B.C.) on the island Lakamtun (Rivero Torres 1992:60). However, ceramics dating to Late Preclassic, Classic, and Late Postclassic to historic times were also recovered on the island (Rivero Torres 1992:46–80), which suggests that the rock art could have been created during these periods as well. Comparative data from painted rock art and archaeological sites at Lakes Mensabak and Petha indicate that similar Miramar painted designs date to Late Postclassic or colonial times, but their creation by historic Lacandon Mayas also cannot be ruled out.

Maya designs can also be found on a cliff near the ruins of Piedras Negras in northwest Petén (fig. 6.21). The motifs include Classic Maya sculptural elements, spirals, and circles (Maler 1901:42–43; Stone 2003:127). One carving represents a turtle carapace and a God K, or K'awil, glyph (Maler 1901:42).

Figure 6.22. Cliff shrine with rock art panels, Lake Petha, Chiapas, Mexico (photograph by Marvin Vann, courtesy of Albion College Library Special Collections).

This design is located above a stream where Mayas placed offerings in niches excavated in the rock (Stone 2003:127). The turtle shell iconography may be related to the name *Ahk*, or "Turtle," held by many nobles at Piedras Negras. Alternatively, it could refer to the cliff as a place of sustenance (*ak tuun* in Yucatec Mayan) that contains water, food, and the souls of people and animals, often symbolized by a split turtle carapace in Maya art.

Other ceremonial cliffs at Lake Petha, Chiapas (fig. 6.22), were explored by Marvin Vann in the early 1970s (Cook 2004). Maler (1901) originally called this lake "Petha," which was taken from a generic Lacandon Mayan word for lake (*pet ha'* or "round water"). Today, this lake is called Lake Guineo by local Tzeltal Mayas, and it was called Itsanok'uh by the lake's original Lacandon inhabitants after a god who resided there (Cook 2004; Palka 2005a). Around the lake, explorers discovered caves that contained numerous human crania exhibiting artificial tabular erect shaping, just like the Late Postclassic to historic Maya skulls in the cliff and cave shrines at Lake Mensabak and Lake Miramar. Vann's images from Lake Petha show fragments of small Late Postclassic and historic tripod plates and water jars. One tall cylindrical incense burner found by Vann at the base of a cliff still retains its paint, including the Maya blue pigment (fig. 6.23). The incense burner depicts a

Figure 6.23. Late Postclassic to historic Maya ceramic incense burner depicting the earth lord emerging from a cave in a limestone cliff, Lake Petha cliff shrine, Chiapas, Mexico (photograph by Marvin Vann, courtesy of Albion College Library Special Collections).

black figure, perhaps an earth lord or underworld lord, emerging from a dark cave in a limestone cliff or mountain. Its base is the split head of a Maya earth/stone zoomorph. Worshippers likely conducted rituals to petition earth gods for things they needed in the shrine where this incense burner was found. The incensario is a Late Postclassic version of the tall cylindrical Classic period incense burners from Palenque.

Various authors have mentioned the abundant rock paintings on the cliffs at Lake Petha (Bruce 1968; Cook 2004; Maler 1901). Their motifs are commonly found at other Maya ritual landscapes and pilgrimage shrines (fig. 6.24), and the designs include several red positive and negative

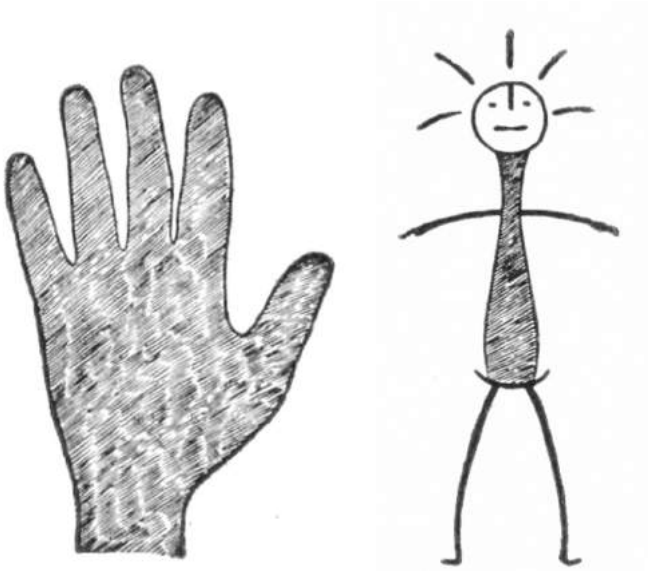

Figure 6.24. Red handprint and black figure on a cliff shrine, Lake Petha, Chiapas, Mexico (after Maler 1901:30; not to scale).

handprints, a yellow footprint pointing upward, a yellow jaguar with red spots, and a black zoomorphic line painting frequently believed to be a serpent (Bruce 1968; Maler 1901:30; Strecker 1982:51). However, this intricate painting actually depicts a crocodilian entity, a design seen in rock art in the Maya area (Stone 1995:54–55). Clues to the identification of this image come from Lacandon beliefs regarding the design. Lacandon religious specialists call this image Itsanok'uh, a Lacandon deity associated with water, hail, rain, and crocodiles. In fact, a Lacandon religious specialist told explorer Teobert Maler to leave this "santo," ritual place, and the lake before the god became upset and generated too much rain. Interestingly, this image is very similar to Postclassic depictions of the Yucatec Maya god Itsamna', who also was associated with water, hail, and crocodiles (Bruce 1967:96–101; Palka 2005a; Soustelle 1970:33; Taube 1992:38). Like images of Itsamna' in his crocodilian aspects (Itzam Kab Ayim), the Petha painting of Itsana' (Noh K'uh) shows a crocodile with an open mouth, a protruding leg, and headdress elements, including a fan and a serpent (fig. 6.25). Furthermore, the Lacandon Maya believe that a crocodile sculpture at Yaxchilan is an image of Itsanok'uh (Marion 1999:173). Clearly, Lacandon people maintain past beliefs associated

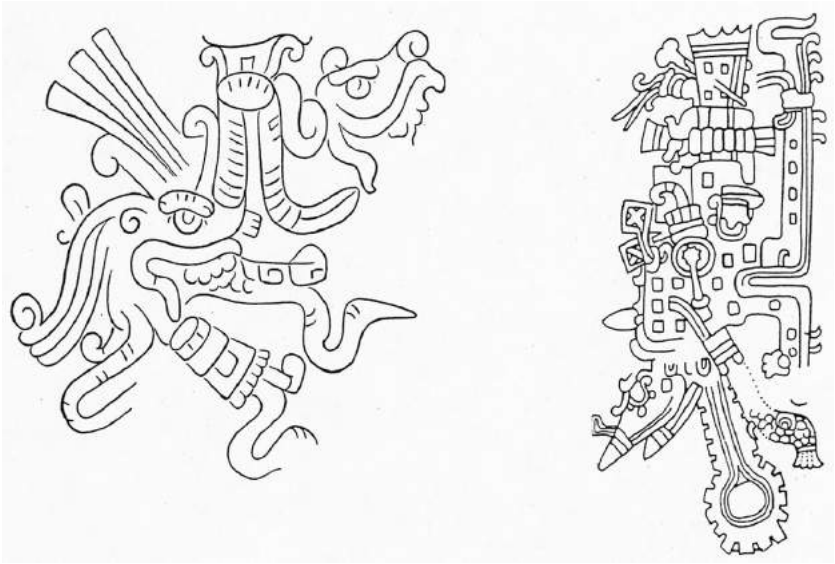

Figure 6.25. Itsamna' images: Lake Petha cliff shrine (left; after Maler 1901:30) and Santa Rita mural, Belize (after Taube 1992:38, fig. 15d; not to scale).

with ritual landscapes in the region, and the images of animals on the cliffs at Petha may indicate that these ritual landscapes are the abodes of earth lords who keep animals in their homes before releasing them to humans.

The Archaeology of Pilgrimage Shrines at Cliffs

Past Maya pilgrims visited cliffs in the Southern Maya Region. Several sanctuaries at the bases of cliffs at Lake Mensabak contain human burials dating to the Late Postclassic and historic periods (fig. 6.26). At one cliff shrine that the local Lacandon named after their god Mensabak, several human crania and postcranial skeletal remains are visible on the surface (fig. 6.27). The Late Postclassic and historic Maya deposited human burials, perhaps in bundles, at the cliff shrines (Cucina et al. n.d., 2012). These remains along with the rock art on the cliffs drew Lacandon Maya men to the shrines for rituals using ceramic incense burners. The Lacandon Maya believe that the cliff shrine of Mensabak is one of the most important pilgrimage sanctuaries in the area, and they attribute the painted rock art on the cliff to the resident gods (Soustelle 1970:28; see fig. 6.17). They also believe that their dead travel

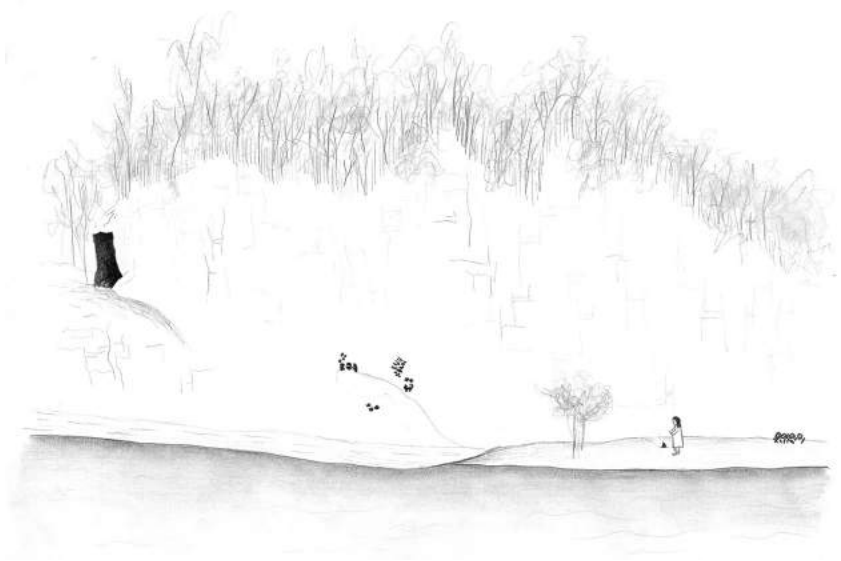

Figure 6.26. Reconstruction of the Mensabak ritual cliff with rock art panels (center), shrine with human skeletons at the base (right), and ceremonial cave (left) (drawing by Paulina Makuch).

to this shrine, which is the house of Mensabak ("Maker of Black Powder/Rain Clouds" [from incense smoke]), a deity who controls rainfall and agricultural fertility. Furthermore, they state that the human bones at the shrine were left either by people entering the house of Mensabak, victims of disease (measles, according to informants) from previous times, or the gods who left this world to join the supernatural realm. Some Lacandon people state that the bones are from the helpers of the gods who died during epidemics and then hid under rocks, which were markers of disease and burial in the colonial period (Boremanse 1998b:202). The Lacandon have told us that past Maya people and their ancestors buried their dead under piles of rock at the bases of cliffs and in cemeteries (Soustelle 1961:51).

Scores of Lacandon incense burners are scattered about the Mensabak cliff shrine. Some incensarios represent male gods, as indicated by paired vertical red and black lines representing their clothing (Bruce 1968:140–41). Others represent female deities, indicated by cross-hatching characteristic of female clothing. Additionally, many miniature incense burners called "gifts of the gods" (Bruce 1968:139), which are used in Lacandon incense burner renewal rituals, are strewn about the shrine. Apparently, the Lacandon deposited some

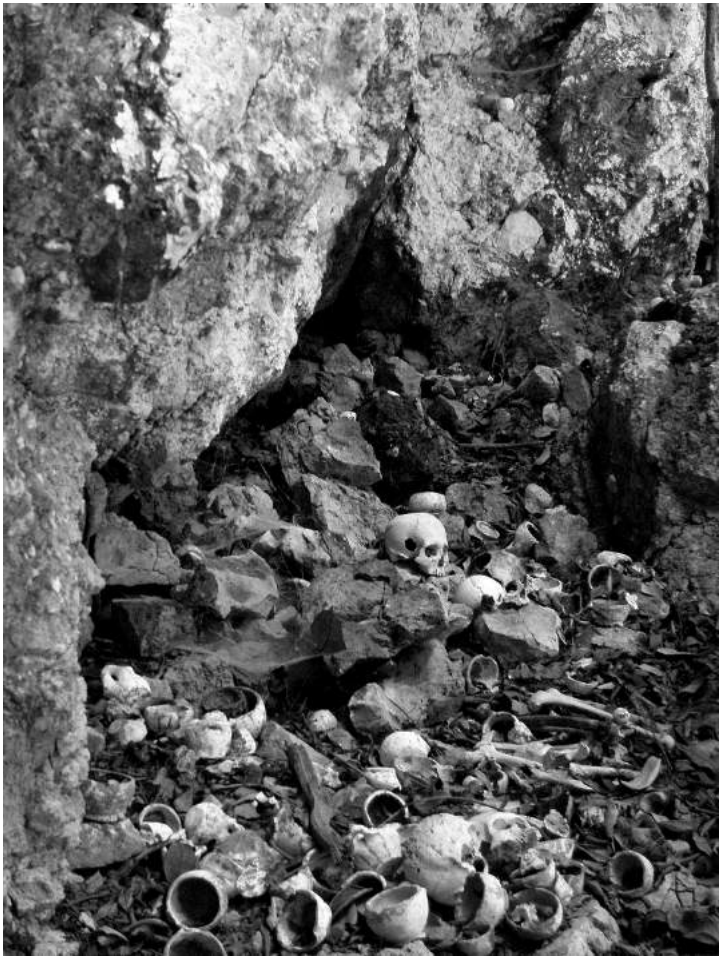

Figure 6.27. Shrine at the base of the Mensabak ritual cliff with human bone and Lacandon Maya incense burners, Lake Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico.

of their used incense burners here. They also left the bones of Lacandon ancestors, according to local oral histories. Other Lacandon artifacts at this shrine include carved wooden incense boards and native ceremonial paper. Lacandon collaborators mention that a conch shell trumpet was once used at the shrine, in addition to stone altars for the god Mensabak and his wife, but they were recently destroyed (Boremanse 1999:257). These rites have a long history: our excavations confirmed that the removal of bones and the lighting of ceremonial fires around them began about five hundred years ago.

The Mensabak shrine is ritually significant because the cliff face above it contains many painted designs. The rock art on the cliff likely dates to Late Preclassic, in addition to Late Postclassic and historic times, if we take into account the iconographic styles and the dating of the occupations at the lake. Since people used the shrine at the base of the cliff largely in Late Postclassic and historic times, however, most of the rock art probably dates to these periods. Some examples of the rock art at the Mensabak shrine cliff include a circle enclosing a cross, a red canine, and a red snake, which may indicate the presence of the master of animals, earth lord, animal spirit companions, or lineage totems. One scene above the bone and incensario shrine depicts two seated human figures in red pigment (fig. 6.28). These figures are seated in front of and are communicating with a deity or ancestor who has a soul essence issuing from his navel. It is conceivable that this image depicts events during rituals at the shrine below. Another design in orange, red, and black paint on this cliff depicts Tlaloc, a deity associated with rain, storms, and conflict worshiped at landscape shrines throughout Mesoamerica (fig. 6.29). The Mensabak design, probably dating to the Late Postclassic period on stylistic grounds, shows the goggle-eyed, fanged deity dumping drops of water from a jar or hand stone. This image is similar to Tlaloc images shown in ancient Maya iconography and Postclassic central Mexican codices and rock art (Cordan 1963:65; Pasztory 1997; Townsend 2000). What is fascinating about this design is that the local Lacandon say it depicts, or actually is, their god Mensabak. Like Tlaloc, Mensabak is the god of rain, thunder and lightning, and conflict for the Lacandon Maya (Bruce 1968; Palka 2005a; Palka and Sánchez Balderas 2012). It is intriguing that Lacandon beliefs about this ritual landscape parallel central Mexican beliefs about Tlalocan, a watery world associated with the dead (López Austin 1997). Souls enter this paradisiacal realm, where they are reborn and live out their lives. Apparently, the Lacandon perpetuate centuries-old beliefs and rituals associated with rain, storms, and the afterlife at this cliff shrine. The Late Postclassic and historic Maya who placed their dead at ritual cliffs along the lakeshore at Mensabak believed that their ancestors would inhabit this watery paradise and communicate with spiritual forces on behalf of their living kin.

The human bones in the Mensabak cliff shrine belong to young male and female adults. These people would have been ideal representatives of the local Maya community who could interact with spiritual forces in the cliff and communicate the needs of their living descendants (Cucina et al. n.d., 2012). While some of the burials were originally placed in the cliff shrines in the

Figure 6.28. Rock painting of a face, essence, or smoke scrolls (orange) emerging from a small red figure (left) in front of two seated red figures at the Mensabak cliff shrine, Lake Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico (photograph by Josuhé Lozada).

Postclassic period, some bones were deposited in colonial times. Additionally, contemporary Lacandon people have recently taken human bones to shrines, including the Mensabak cliff. However, photographs of the Mensabak shrine from the 1930s to the 1970s show that many human skeletons and skulls were already there (Soustelle 1936:221, photo 35), and our excavations found others buried in the shrine. The skeletons more than likely represent secondary historic burials at the shrine over the last few hundred years. We excavated additional burials beneath the shrine, which contained offerings of marine shell—symbols of the watery underworld. Abundant carbon in the buried deposits indicates that the burning of offerings has taken place here over a long time. The several crania found at the Mensabak shrine exhibit tabular erect artificial head shaping, which was most commonly practiced by Postclassic Maya populations. Local Lacandon men have mentioned that many burials can be found under piles of rocks at the bases of cliffs all along the lake (Boremanse 2007:120).

Maya pilgrims left designs seen on the cliff at the Mensabak shrine that include positive handprints in red pigment (fig. 6.30). These handprints appear in a panel on the cliff, and they may have been left by Late Postclassic and historic Maya pilgrims who visited the cliff shrine. Lacandon informants have

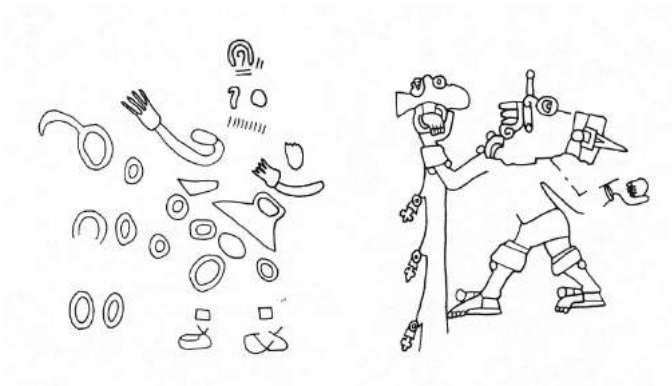

Figure 6.29. Late Postclassic images of Tlaloc as a rain god: Mensabak cliff shrine (left; after Bruce 1968:146) and Codex Borgia (right; after Díaz and Rodgers 1993:50; not to scale).

described the red handprints as the last signs left by the gods to show that they had finished painting the rock art (Duby 1944:67). Maya visitors placed right-hand prints on the right side and left-hand prints to the left of this rock panel. After a ritual touching the cliff with their hands, the artists pecked out circles in the palms of the prints, or they intentionally left the palms blank, thus making portals in the centers of the hands (see fig. 2.24). In Classic Maya art, hands cover the mouths of certain deities, hand glyphs contain circles in the palms, and faces on round shields have handprints with mouths that symbolize portals (Stuart and Stuart 2008:217, fig. 70, 223, fig. 74). In Room 2 of the Bonampak murals, for example, the palm of a red handprint on a fan or shield has a circle with a dot or an eye representing a portal (Reyes-Valerio 1993:37). Additionally, a negative handprint in the Tixcuytun Cave in Yucatán exhibits a circle drawn in the palm, and a positive handprint has a blank spot in its palm, which may also signify a portal to spiritual realms (Barrera Rubio and Peraza Lope 1999:photos 3 and 4; see fig. 2.26).

The handprints added to the spiritual magnetism of the Mensabak shrine by making its ritual importance visible, and they illustrate the importance of hands with portals in the palms for transferring spiritual energy through touch. Lacandon religious specialists, for instance, receive energies from their gods during ceremonies, and they transfer these energies to sick people by touching them with their hands during healing rituals. Intriguingly, the Lacandon Maya refer to the palm as being "the front of, the forward part of, or the presence of" a person's hand (*u tan in k'ab*; Bruce 1968:79). Lacandon

Figure 6.30. Red handprints on the Mensabak cliff, Lake Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico. Note the faded left-hand prints on the left and circles in the palms.

men also communicate with their deities through their hands by placing their palms and fingertips together (*u naabtik* or "its palm measuring") and interpreting the deity's response by reading how the fingertips come together (Boremanse 2007:131–33). Furthermore, the Maya in highland Guatemala breathe on their palms to ritually activate them before touching objects during ceremonies (Molesky-Poz 2006:97). Handprints are also found on cliffs at Lake Miramar and Lake Petha, in addition to Maya ruins and ceremonial caves throughout the study region, and there they also symbolized the touching of ritual places and the transference of spiritual essences through the palm.

In addition to red handprints, a yellow footprint can be seen on a cliff at Lake Petha (Maler 1901:30). In pilgrimages everywhere, the touching of shrines with hands and feet is common practice, thus hand and foot imagery commonly occurs at religious shrines. Interestingly, Lacandon collaborators pointed out impressions of human feet pecked on a cliff at Lake Mensabak (fig. 6.31). These footprints may have indicated the presence of pilgrims or spiritual essences, or perhaps they marked an important ritual stop for Maya

Figure 6.31. Carved footprints on a cliff near the K'ak' cliff shrine, Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico (see fig. 3.6).

worshipers. Footprints in rock art are still symbolically significant for the local Lacandon Maya. In Lacandon Maya myths, a specific deity who devours people, U Winklil Aaktun, lives in a cavity in a cliff that is marked by the god's footprints (Boremanse 2006:184), which probably also denote a pilgrimage shrine, perhaps the Mensabak cliff itself.

Another cliff shrine at Lake Mensabak called Sak Tat contains several human skeletons (fig. 6.32), just like the Mensabak shrine, as well as Lacandon ceramic incense burners. These incense burners were placed at the base of the cliff in the shrine where Lacandon religious specialists made offerings to the resident gods. Additionally, a small number of ceramic sherds of Late Preclassic and Late Postclassic times were found there. Maya ritual specialists appear to have brought these ceramic sherds as offerings to the shrine along with human bones. Interestingly, the ceramics found at the shrine come from diverse locations, including the Mensabak area, the Usumacinta River region, Tabasco, and Campeche. This ceramic assemblage suggests that Maya pilgrims came from different areas to perform rituals at the shrine and left the sherds as blessings or that pilgrims had economic ties to different

Figure 6.32. Sak Tat cliff shrine with exposed human burials, Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico. Note the Lacandon Maya ceramic incense burners (right).

areas. Excavations at Sak Tat demonstrated that the Maya buried their dead at the shrine, and we recovered interments that may have been bundled (Cucina et al. n.d., 2012; Deeb et al. 2011). Bones from the lower levels of the excavation were radiocarbon dated to A.D. 1460 and 1650. The Maya placed these burials in the ground and piled rocks around them, and the local Lacandon report piles of rocks at this shrine that contained human bone and green obsidian blades. However, some skeletons may have been deposited as secondary burials and other bones merely left as offerings or pilgrim blessings. Lacandon informants also speak of recently taking human bones they encountered in nearby caves to Sak Tat for rituals and safekeeping. Skeletal remains at the Sak Tat shrine show signs of violence from Late Postclassic to historic times. One mandible exhibits a clean, straight cut that removed the left condole. This wound was caused by a metal machete or sword (Cucina et al. n.d., 2012). One cranium exhibits cut marks from scalping by a metal knife, and another shows blunt force trauma in the back caused by a club or from falling on a rock.

Colonial period descriptions of Maya burials and religious beliefs in the

lowlands may shed light on the mortuary patterns seen in shrines at Lake Mensabak. At Sac Bahlam, for instance, the Ch'olti'-Lacandon Maya buried their dead in fields a short distance away from town (Houwald 1979:357). On the graves of the men they placed seats ("banquitos" or wooden stools), cigars or rolled tobacco, and "other things used by men"; the women's graves were covered with grinding stones, ceramic vessels, gourds, and other similar domestic utensils (Houwald 1979:91, 357). Other Maya groups near Nohha buried their dead in circular holes with the same accoutrements, but they drew the knees up to the head with cords (López de Cogolludo 1957:699), a pattern seen at Mensabak. The Manche-Ch'ol buried their dead in their houses or away from their residences where a mound was constructed over the tomb (Feldman 2000:111), just like past Maya peoples at Mensabak and ethnographic Lacandon populations (McGee 1990). The Manche-Ch'ol and ethnographic Lacandon Maya placed the utensils of the deceased, such as axes, knives, cooking pots, and gourds, in the tomb. The Lacandon living in the Lake Mensabak region buried their dead near their settlements and piled rocks on the grave (Soustelle 1961:51), as seen archaeologically at Mensabak.

Human bones have been ritually important in the Southern Maya Region, which we know from art and burial practices. In the early nineteenth century, the Lacandon Maya in southwestern Petén and eastern Chiapas venerated the bones of a Catholic priest (Barrera 2005:21) or communicated with him through his remains as was done in the Maya area (Astor-Aguilera 2010). This respected priest, Manuel de La Chica, founded missions among Lacandon Maya populations in southwestern Petén (Palka 2005b:111–12). The Lacandon Maya burned some of Father Chica's bones and deposited them in a river instead of burying them, which had religious significance, perhaps in part related to renewal rites with water. They took other skeletal remains of the priest, including his skull, to San José, Petén (Barrera 2005:28), where the local Itzaj Maya venerated the remains as sacred relics, calling them Tata Padre (Great Father). One of the skulls in the San José church, which the Itzaj Maya have used for generations in processions on All Soul's Day, may belong to Padre Chica. Modern Itzaj state that the skulls belong to important men, Christian men, church officials, and "spiritual men of ancient times as stated by the grandfathers of our grandfathers" (Hofling 1991:261–79; Reina 1962:31–32). Additionally, the Itzaj Maya in the village say they witnessed a skull take part in a ghostly procession on the calm waters of Lake Peten Itza (Reina 1962:35), which

Figure 6.33. Rock art on the Tzibana ritual cliff, Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico. Note the handprints, animals, anthropomorphic designs, and larger standing human figures with outstretched arms (bottom-center) and hieroglyph panel (center) (photograph by Rebecca Deeb).

would also connect bones to spiritual forces in the water. Itzaj rituals surrounding skulls were important for calling the souls of the dead to enjoy food offerings, curing sick family members, recognizing religious devotion and protection, and thinking about dead relatives (Reina 1962).

Another ritual cliff at Lake Mensabak called Tzibana (House of the [God of] Painted Writing) by the Lacandon Maya was an important pilgrimage shrine (see fig. 5.9). A concentration of designs on this cliff appears freshly painted and may date to Late Postclassic and historic times, coeval with occupations at the lake (fig. 6.33). The designs include a spider monkey, negative red handprints, anthropomorphic figures, and a hunting scene or possibly depict a conflict involving a person with a bow and arrow flanked by running dogs. The target is a humanoid figure shown directly in front of the bow. A Spanish priest's letter describes paintings of the Ch'olti'-Lacandon Maya of Sac Bahlam that are similar to these rock paintings (Comparato 1984:18). On the dried mud walls of their houses and parchments, the

Ch'olti'-Lacandon painted stick figures, human caricatures, and what the Spanish described as monkey and monkey-like designs. Comparato (1984:18n27) notes that similar designs have been found in Maya ruins in the southern lowlands, including graffiti at Tikal. The historic Lacandon Maya painted similar designs on their houses and ceremonial robes (McGee 1990; Tozzer 1907); they painted in red since this color resembled blood, and the gods preferred to see and smell it (Boremanse 1998b:203–4). Therefore, historic Ch'olti' and Lacandon Mayas could have made the designs at Mensabak during their pilgrimages to these cliffs.

Another painting on the Tzibana cliff from Late Preclassic times depicts two human figures walking. One figure has a cloth headdress draped down the back of his head like in Preclassic Maya art. The figures extend their hands while holding objects and thus may be shown making offerings during a pilgrimage to the cliff. The ceremonial cave at Tzibana is located behind this cliff, and these figures may have been understood to be heading toward it. Or the images may show deities accepting offerings. A faded inscription is found between the heads of the two figures (fig. 6.34). The style of the text suggests a Late Preclassic or perhaps an Early Classic date, which is similar to that of the Joloniel Cave texts discussed earlier. The second glyph in the two-column text may be the dedicatory *TAB-yi* verb (or possibly *tabay*), which shows a foot going up the stairs of the temple (see fig. 2.24). Thus, the text could refer to the dedication of the text and rock art, or it may refer to the dedication of offerings at the ritual cliff. What is fascinating is that the local Lacandon again preserve memories of this ritual cliff in its name, Tzibana, which refers to Painted Writing House—perhaps this very glyph panel.

Excavations at the archaeological site of Tzibana, found just to the west of the painted cliffs, uncovered numerous artifacts dating from the Late Postclassic to early historic times (Deeb et al. 2011). Archaeologists uncovered diagnostic ceramics, including tripod bowls, plates, colanders, water jars, pottery stamps, and green obsidian. Radiocarbon dates ranged from A.D. 1300 to 1500. Furthermore, archaeologists recovered copper bells and artifacts, along with many pieces of cave formations. Green obsidian from central Mexico and copper bells from west Mexico were brought to Mensabak by pilgrims and traders. The bells were probably used in pilgrimage rituals to make music or noise resembling rain, as in other parts of Mesoamerica. Researchers found lumps of red pigment, which Lacandon informants identified as the pigment used in the red paintings on the Tzibana cliff shrine, as well. Significant amounts of animal bone were excavated, perhaps from

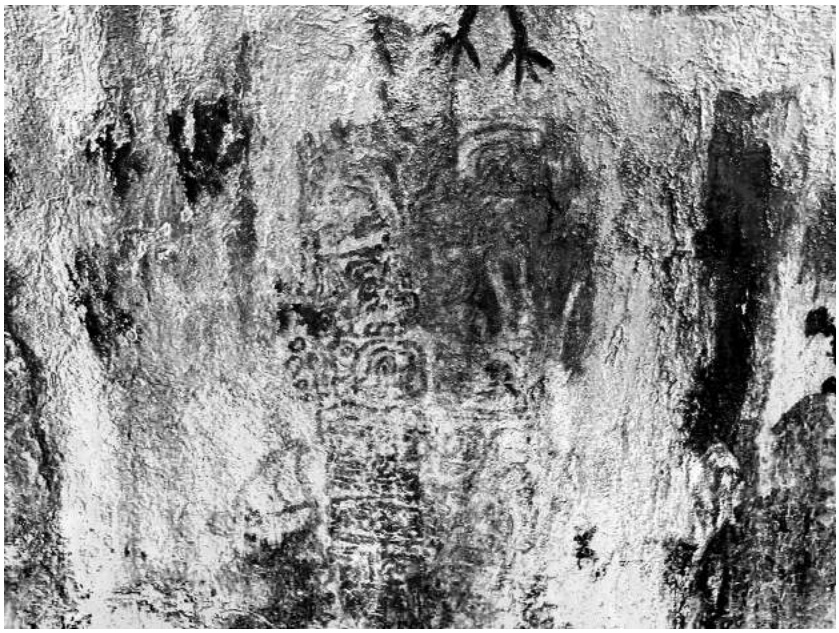

Figure 6.34. Red-painted hieroglyphic panel (center) on the Tzibana cliff, Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico. Note the headdress and face (lower left) and negative red handprint over the right hieroglyph column (photograph by Rebecca Deeb).

feasting, but archaeologists did not find grinding stones or many chert tools used for food preparation. The Late Preclassic Maya also lived at the Tzibana site, and they constructed large temples and a plaza there. Additionally, the Maya constructed a ceremonial platform above the cliff with the rock paintings, most likely in Late Postclassic times. This large square platform differs in size and shape from the domestic structures, is built on the edge of the cliff, and is isolated from domestic platforms. On this platform the Maya performed rituals and probably tossed offerings into the water in front of the cliff paintings. The ceremonial architecture, plaza, square platform, trade goods from distant places, pieces of cave formations, and presence of the large cave and cliff paintings are strong evidence for pilgrimage to Tzibana. The low percentage of food preparation implements and the relatively high percentage of exotic copper bells and green obsidian at the site also support the pilgrimage hypothesis.

In this chapter I demonstrated that mountains and cliffs have always been

significant ritual landscapes for Maya cultures. Mountains have shrines on their summits and at their bases, and they frequently contain caves and springs, which have long drawn the attention of Maya worshippers. The monumental pilgrimage shrine on Mirador Mountain at Lake Mensabak is a unique place because of its leveled summit and cave shrine, terraced slope, ritual boulders and cenotes, and pilgrimage sanctuary at its base. This and many other mountain shrines were important for Maya rituals related to water, food, and human health and fertility. Ritual mountains are also associated with ancestral deities, people's origins, and community territory. Cliffs as ritual landscapes were significant for their visibility, their function as doorways to gods' houses, and because they often have rock art. Cliffs found near water were likely seen as portals into a watery, paradisiacal realm where the souls of the deceased traveled. The souls of community members were housed in these cliffs and mountains, and they mediated with spiritual forces on behalf of the living. Because of their religious importance, these shrines were destinations for Maya pilgrims, who traveled to them to communicate with ancestors and spiritual forces. The purposes of Maya pilgrimages to ritual landscapes and their functions in Maya society are discussed in the final chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions

Interpreting Maya Ritual Landscapes and Pilgrimage

> When we arrive to ask for a cure for the sick at a stream or mountain, we speak to them [the earth lords], we tell them to release them [the victims' souls] because we have not stolen anything from them. We don't ask for anything, we don't have anything of theirs, that is why they do not have to bind us [our souls] up in the mountains, caves, or rivers. We arrive at the cave of San Antonio [Mountain] where the [Earth] God that we believe in exists.
>
> —Ch'ol Maya narrative, José L. Pérez Chacón, *Los Choles de Tila y su mundo*, 1993, 289

Throughout this book, we have seen the importance of ritual landscapes in the Maya worldview, pilgrimage traditions, and social life. Additionally, I argue that Maya pilgrimage to ritual landscapes and associated religious and social behaviors must be examined holistically instead of piece by piece. With this approach, we can better understand Maya ritual landscapes as communicating places where deities and ancestral spirits, who live apart from humans, are contacted so that people and gods might maintain mutual ceremonial obligations. As portrayed in the opening narrative, pilgrimages to significant geographical features and the rituals conducted there help achieve world balance. Thus, rituals in the landscape are necessary for the collective good, and pilgrimages must be carried out continuously, not just a few times in a lifetime, to preserve the covenants with spiritual forces. Pilgrimages in this culture area were also carried out to alleviate stresses, ranging from illnesses to conflicts to droughts. Maya and Mesoamerican pilgrimage, therefore, contrasts with

other religious traditions in which pilgrimages are undertaken to define self- or group identity or to acquire economic prosperity, individual blessings, and personal health.

This study examines Maya ritual landscapes using archaeological, ethnohistorical, and ethnographic data to demonstrate continuities in religion and pilgrimage from the development of Maya civilization to the present. Archaeology, with its focus on material culture, provides insights on the evolution of Maya pilgrimage to ritual landscapes, and the landscapes discussed in this book, such as caves, boulders, ruins, bodies of water, islands, mountains, and cliffs, figure prominently in Maya religion and community identity. These landscapes are places of origin of local tutelary deities, ancestors, and, hence, entire communities. At the same time, the use of pilgrimage shrines in the landscape surrounding settlements was crucial for setting community boundaries. Ritual landscapes are fundamentally important since they are the homes of divine forces that release necessary resources to worshipers and protect their communities from conflict, illness, and infertility. Pilgrimage to ritual landscapes requires people to leave their settlements to communicate with divine forces directly at these places and acquire what they need for community survival. Maya elites and male religious specialists have managed shrines in ritual landscapes and organized pilgrimages for the collective good, and these ritual practices have structured social organization, political life, in addition to individual and group economic benefits.

CONTEXTUALIZING MAYA RITUAL LANDSCAPES

The Maya selected particular ritual landscapes for their unique physical properties and their impacts on the human body and senses; these landscapes included large cave openings, isolated boulders, mountain summits, and springs near cliffs (Brady and Ashmore 1999; Stone 1992; Vogt 1981). Such landscape features are often found together: pools of water inside caves, ruins on mountains, boulders near rivers, and islands in ritual lakes. Examples of combined ritual landscapes that attracted Maya worshipers and that we have covered in this book include the large Naj Tunich Cave and its spring, the Xoc rock art shrine with a boulder and stream, and the ruins of Chinkultic near cliffs, caves, and cenotes (see figs. 4.26 and 5.13). Movement to and around these sanctuaries, such as the Mirador Mountain shrine at Lake Mensabak, affects people and how they experience the world. Pilgrims

encounter unusual sights, sounds, and smells at ritual landscapes, like rushing water out of a spring, panoramic views from mountaintops, and odiferous, dark caves. Touching the sanctuaries is important, as we know from the handprints found on cliffs, ruins, and caves. Eating clay and drinking water at the shrines, such as Esquipulas and the Ch'orti' Maya springs, have been important practices at ritual landscapes as well.

Additionally, ritual landscapes have influenced the actions and thoughts of Maya people (Olsen 2010; Tilley 2008). Their significant features drew worshipers who attributed to them divine origins. Ritual landscapes have shaped Maya religion, mythology, and worldview. Mountains are believed to house the ancestors, human and animal souls, water, and food. At the same time, caves are seen as the homes of earth lords and the paths where heavenly bodies travel at night. Mythical serpents and regenerative forces are found in culturally significant bodies of water. Boulders represent culture heroes and ancestors or house forces responsible for rain and the fertility of the earth. Furthermore, the landscape is seen as alive or as containing animate forces (Monaghan 1995; Sandstrom 2005; Taube 2004; see fig. 4.13), thus, the land and spiritual forces residing there must be sustained through offerings given by humans. Because of their outstanding features and associated religious beliefs, these places have pulled Maya people to them for ceremonies around community identity and to ensure group survival. The people undertaking the ceremonies generated material culture at ritual landscapes, such as shrine constructions, rock art, burials, and offerings to the gods. In turn, the material remains of ritual add to the spiritual magnetism of the impressive sites and attract even more pilgrims.

Maya Communicating Places

As demonstrated in this book, Maya people have utilized significant landscape features for pilgrimage and ceremony from the distant past to the present. Ritual landscapes are viewed as entryways to, or the actual homes of, Maya deities and ancestors (Boremanse 2006; Brown 2005; Prufer and Brady 2005). This culture area contains many ritual landscape shrines since spiritual essences permeate the Maya universe, and the abodes of the deities have numerous entrances. The Maya visit these sites to contact spiritual forces, and some places are more effective for communication depending on the ritual circumstances and type of shrine (Vogt 1981). For example, earth lords receive offerings at certain caves, boulders, and springs. During droughts,

supplicants visit high mountains to ask spiritual forces to help correct the cosmic imbalances responsible for the lack of rain. Additionally, different Maya social groups have their own places for communicating with divine forces, including multiple mountain and cave shrines. All of these practices multiply the number of pilgrimage shrines. Moreover, the physical features of the landscape are viewed by indigenous people as being extensions of spiritual forces residing in them. Because of the separation of ritual landscapes from settlements, Maya people are obligated to make pilgrimages to these places to provide offerings to spiritual essences to communicate with them and sustain them.

Maya ritual landscapes associated with divine forces are usually the deep forests, hills, and rivers surrounding Maya settlements (Stone 1992). Gods and ancestors, not people, live in the ritual landscape. Shrines and ritual material culture are found here, not domestic structures or behaviors. Because of their connections to ritual landscapes and nature, these spiritual forces can be seen as "ecological beings" (Astor-Aguilera 2010:216). Maya ritual landscapes, which house powerful spiritual forces and the sources of water, food, and everything people require, are located away from human settlements (Taube 2003), and these places must be approached with caution and after appropriate preparations have been made. Ritual landscapes can be dangerous to people, who must be ritually cleansed before leaving their domestic spheres to interact with spiritual forces. Hence, Maya elites and ritual specialists, mostly men, have been viewed as being connected to divine forces, ritually pure, and able to lead pilgrimages and ceremonies.

Because of their physical and spiritual properties, I refer to Maya ritual landscapes as "communicating places," following the perspectives of Astor-Aguilera (2010). Maya people communicate with spiritual essences through objects such as large stones, deity images, ancient artifacts, bones of ancestors, and shrines in the landscape. In Maya cultures, ritual landscapes became central locations for contacting spiritual essences (see fig. 1.13). These places have heightened spiritual magnetism, and they contain material traces of divine energies, such as portals to supernatural realms, images, and other representations of deities. While Maya worshipers also perform rituals at home altars to communicate with spiritual forces, the ceremonies are viewed as being more effective if people travel to the homes of the gods in the landscape. Yucatec Maya religious specialists, for instance, state that to better communicate with divine forces they go to "holes in the earth" and other places in the forest where communicating objects, such as stones or trees,

assist in transferring messages (Astor-Aguilera 2010:118–20). At these places, Yucatec Maya men believe they get to the root of religious matters since their offerings and prayers more effectively penetrate the earth, where spiritual energies actually reside.

The communication with divine forces in ritual landscapes is apparent in Maya religious beliefs. Gods and ancestors hear Maya prayers and partake in their offerings at shrines (McGee 1990; Vogt 1993). Human burials at shrines in ritual landscapes indicate that people's soul energies are found in these places (see fig. 6.27). The polluting forces associated with them can be contained by spiritual forces in ritual landscapes. At the same time, the dead transmit messages to spiritual forces on behalf of living descendants. Communication with spiritual forces can be seen in the iconography and material culture at the sanctuaries. Carved and painted faces with eyes on the walls of caves likely represent the presence of earth lords, ancestors, or other spiritual essences (see fig. 4.12). Deity faces with open mouths, as they are about to speak or consume offerings (Astor-Aguilera 2010:38–39), are common motifs in rock art, stone monuments, modeled incense burners, and anthropomorphic figurines in Maya ritual landscapes (see figs. 1.1, 3.20, and 4.24). Much like the anthropomorphic faces on objects, the faces on the cave walls communicated with worshippers. Eyes painted on the shrines were interpreted by ritual participants as deities witnessing the rituals. Pilgrims in turn saw the manifestations of deities at the shrines in the impressive landscape features, iconography, and ceremonial objects. For example, Maya pilgrims are shown communicating with spiritual forces in a mural at San Bartolo and the painted panel at the Mensabak cliff shrine (see figs. 4.13 and 6.28). Pilgrims also sat on the wooden seat near skeletons in the cave at the Mensabak shrine to communicate with ancestors (see fig. 4.6).

Maya communicating places, where interaction between people and spiritual essences takes place, is paralleled at pilgrimage sites across the globe (Morinis 1984; Proser 2010). Sanctuaries often contain oracles that speak to pilgrims (Dillon 1997; Freidel 1975). However, communication with divine forces in the Maya world is not a rare practice: messages are constantly being sent and received. Hence, Maya communicating places cannot be viewed as sacred places that were worshiped at only periodically. Maya people make pilgrimages to ritual landscapes to intensively interact with spiritual essences to obtain things they need and renew cosmic balance. Humans co-exist with spiritual forces, blurring the line between sacred and profane realms: Maya men provide their families with food and shelter in addition to providing

offerings to ancestral gods. They present offerings to the earth lords in exchange for rain and animating energies, which is just as necessary for high crop yields as planting and weeding the fields.

Maya Ritual Landscapes and Community Identity

Maya ritual landscapes represent community and cultural identities since tutelary deities and ancestral spirits originated in them. According to local mythologies, people come from ritual landscapes close to and associated with their communities (Ayres and Mauricio 1999; Christie 2009; Staller 2008). The myths and histories regarding a community's divine forces are reenacted during rituals in the landscape, which effectively link people with their gods in the surrounding topography (Singh 2002; Smith 1999; Snead 2008). The Maya maintain pilgrimage shrines in the hills and forests around their towns to provide offerings that honor and request protection from their gods and ancestors. This ritual interaction is the basis of Maya ties to lands, religious beliefs, and histories (Wilson 1995). Communities are named after significant ritual landscapes, prominent geographical features, and their resident spiritual forces. The ancient Maya place-names of *Lakam Ha'* (Wide Water/River/Lake) and *Lakam Tun* (Wide Stone/Island) in lowland Chiapas, for instance, represent connections between ritual landscapes and community identity. Additionally, the links between the names of ritual caves, centers, and polities in ancient Maya society nicely illustrate the connections between Maya places, identity, and territory (Brady and Colas 2005; Stone 1995). Maya utilization of ritual landscapes became commonplace in the Late Preclassic period, when large populations concentrated in centers, agricultural fields expanded, and elite classes grew. The burgeoning centers required resources, protection from increased competition, and the maintenance of community identity and boundaries; therefore, the Maya turned to ritual landscapes to achieve world order. Elites and religious specialists then drew power from managing ceremonies at the shrines (Freidel 1981). At Lake Mensabak, for example, Maya elites focused their rituals and shrine constructions at the Tzibana cave and cliff in addition to Mirador Mountain. In Late Postclassic to early historic times at the lake, ritual landscapes were dispersed as different factions and lineages around the lake utilized various caves, cliffs, and mountains to maintain their separate ceremonial ties to landscapes. Later still, small numbers of contemporary Lacandon Maya men appropriated numerous

shrines around the lake for healing and agricultural rites along with the construction of their social identity.

Modern Maya communities preserve connections to local ritual landscapes, resident deities, and community lands (Josserand and Hopkins 2007; Tedlock 2010). People from each community understand the importance of visits to ritual landscapes on their territory for structuring their social identity. For example, the ties between Maya communities, kinship groups, and ritual landscapes are quite pronounced in Tzotzil Maya society in the Chiapas highlands (Vogt 1981). Tzotzil Mayas in each community undertake pilgrimages to and rituals at the mountains, caves, cliffs, and springs found in their territory to reinforce their social connections with one another and with their lands. Also, Tzotzil communities carry out ceremonies at mountains containing ancestral spirits and the souls of Maya people in addition to the maintenance of lineage shrines at water holes. Rituals at these places reinforce community identity and actually mark territory. Tzeltal Mayas refer to their origins and social identity by invoking ritual mountains (Pitarch Ramón 1996). The Tzeltal believe that specific mountains contain ancestral gods and the souls of people from their communities. The Tzeltal Maya emerged from these mountains, and thus, the spiritual forces that reside within nurture and protect the people and their lands. The Lacandon Maya village of Mensabak is another place where we see the intersection of ritual landscapes and identity. The community was named after the ceremonial cliff shrine on Lake Mensabak, which exhibits many painted designs and ancestral burials and is the house of a deity (Mensabak) connected to rain and the dead (see figs. 6.27 and 6.29). The maintenance of ritual landscapes around the lake and the visibility of their archaeological remains are important for marking community territorial boundaries and for the preservation of local indigenous heritage. The Lacandon at Mensabak show their ancestral connections to their lands at ritual landscapes where they recount the mythologies and histories of these places.

MAYA PILGRIMAGE TO RITUAL LANDSCAPES

Since Maya ritual landscapes are found outside human settlements, people must go on pilgrimages to visit important shrines and communicate with spiritual forces. Separation from home, experiences at the sanctuaries, and subsequent personal and social transformation are central elements of Maya pilgrimage (Morinis 1992; Turner and Turner 1978). The separation from

domestic realms and travel to ritual landscapes intensifies the experience and draws attention to the goals of pilgrimage. Journeys to ritual landscapes remind people to focus on their communion with spiritual essences and ancestors. The unique places, including mountaintop shrines, ruined buildings, cliffs with rock art, and large cave chambers, profoundly affect the ceremonial experiences of Maya pilgrims. Movement between landscape shrines and at the shrines themselves is essential in Maya pilgrimages (Candy 2009), like those to Lake Mensabak, and allows people to visit the abodes of different spiritual essences.

In the Maya area and in Mesoamerica in general, pilgrims may travel short distances to ritual landscapes. Maya pilgrims visit shrines at mountains, caves, and ruins within a few kilometers of their settlements (Vogt 1981, 1993). Hammond and Bobo (1994:19) point out that the Late Postclassic and historic Maya made pilgrimages to the archaeological site of La Milpa, Belize, and they show that pilgrimages over short distances are common around the world. Furthermore, their use of shrines near settlements indicates that the Maya communicate with gods and ancestors belonging to their communities and that rituals here effectively mark community boundaries. I would stress that it is the journey to ritual landscapes and back home that is important in pilgrimage, not the distance covered. However, longer trips to regionally significant ritual landscapes are also known in Maya and Mesoamerican pilgrimage, especially when the journeys are related to annual agricultural cycles, reinforcing ethnic identity, or alleviating social or environmental stress. Maya pilgrimages differ from processions within settlements, which is a different kind of ritual movement that takes place nearer to human lived spaces (Orr 2001).

In pilgrimage, travel to ritual sites and home again, in addition to movement within shrines, signifies the transformation of the worshipers (Alvarado Solís 2008; Turner and Turner 1978). Pilgrims overcome obstacles during their journeys, and their movement through unique landscapes impacts their bodies and senses. In a telling example, stained-glass windows in the Christian church at Mount Sinai illustrate saints traveling to ritual landscapes and being contacted by divine beings, images that in turn symbolize the journey and transformation of the pilgrims viewing the images (Coleman and Elsner 1994:84–85; see fig. 1.3). The depictions of movement and divine contact at Mount Sinai inform the pilgrims that they have attained their spiritual goals. Similar experiences were had in the Maya region, where people traveled to mountains, deep cave passages, or lakeshores. When they

completed their pilgrimages, the spiritual forces responded to their offerings. Depictions of Maya worshipers in iconography at ritual locations, such as the San Diego cliff carving or on the stone monuments at pilgrimage sites such as Chinkultic, show these people completing rituals to contact spiritual forces and being transformed by the realization of their religious goals (see figs. 6.3 and 6.19).

Like in other cultures, ancient Maya pilgrimage to ritual landscapes may have been likened to a cosmic journey (Singh 2002:9). This type of journey took place at the Mirador Mountain shrine at Lake Mensabak, which was a major pilgrimage destination in the region with its canoe ports, plazas, and monumental constructions. In this case, Maya worshipers returned to the waters of creation and fertility that surrounded this island and its hollow, ancestral mountain of sustenance. Maya pilgrims canoed across these waters, just as their ancestors did, to reach their place of origin and abundance. Pilgrims climbed through the thirteen realms of the heavens represented by the thirteen terraces on the hillside. They ascended to the sky, following the journey of the sun, to reach the entrances into the underworld at the caves. Furthermore, they communicated with ancestral spirits at the mountain's shrines and petitioned for rain and good harvests. Separation from domestic realms and travel to ritual landscapes reinforce the liminal status of pilgrims and enhance the ritual experience and transformational powers of the journey.

Covenants, Maya Pilgrimage, and Collective Benefits

As shown in this study, an important goal of pilgrimage for Maya and Mesoamerican people is the maintenance of covenants with spiritual forces to achieve cosmic balance (Kubler 1984; Martínez Marín 1972; Monaghan 1995). The interaction between humans and spiritual essences is more efficacious if undertaken at the homes of the deities in the landscape. People make pilgrimages to ritual landscapes to give offerings of food, prayer, sacrifices, and music to spiritual essences there, which nourish the gods and ancestors at these places. Moreover, spiritual essences possess things people require, such as rain, food, and soul energies, in addition to the ability to provide good harvests, health, children, protection, and economic prosperity, which they release when given offerings. According to Mesoamerican perspectives, people and spiritual essences are mutually dependent, and this dependency creates world balance.

However, Maya and Mesoamerican ritual landscapes and pilgrimage traditions have features that separate them from their counterparts across the globe. As already stated, the continuation of cosmic balance for the collective good is an important part of Mesoamerican pilgrimage. While pilgrimage in Mesoamerica can be undertaken for personal reasons, such as for health, fertility, and economic gain, religious specialists seek rain for the community's crops, protection from enemies and disease, and the continuation of society and the world order. Additionally, pilgrimage to Maya ritual landscapes is obligatory and part of everyday life. Pilgrimages have to be undertaken to placate the spiritual forces and maintain the covenants. Thus, Maya pilgrimage to ritual landscapes is not voluntary, as it is elsewhere, and it is omnipresent in Maya communities, as seen in the archaeological and ethnographic records. Pilgrimages help sustain spiritual forces, and Maya peoples receive health and prosperity in return. The remains of ritual offerings to gods are present in a multitude of shrines. For example, ceramic vessels convey food and drink to divine forces. Human and animal bones are deposited in shrines to ensure the renewal of their soul energies, which can then be released by spiritual forces.

In the Maya area, the chronology of community landscape shrines provides additional insights on pilgrimage rituals and their periodicity (table 7.1). Pilgrimages to Lake Mensabak, for instance, began at state-sponsored shrines at the end of Preclassic times, mainly at Mirador Mountain and the Tzibana cliff shrine. After this period these sanctuaries and the inland settlement of Noh K'uh were abandoned by the Maya following regional political collapse. Populations may have gone to the nearby sites of Palenque, Yaxchilan, and Piedras Negras, which were growing in political, economic, and ceremonial importance in the Classic period. At the same time, the collapse at Lake Mensabak may have occurred due to local political problems or periods of drought. It is important to note that perhaps one of the driest periods in the region may have occurred at the end of the Late Preclassic period, as measured by low river discharge levels in Chiapas and Tabasco (Folan and Gunn 2007; Vargas Pacheco 2002). Hansen and colleagues (2008:38) have also put forth evidence for ecological change and political collapse at this time in sites in Petén. The large-scale Maya pilgrimages managed by elites at the communal shrines at Lake Mensabak during the Late Preclassic period were likely undertaken to petition the spiritual essences for the return of rain, good harvests, health, protection, and world balance. People would also have been drawn to the lake because of its water.

TABLE 7.1. Chronology, pilgrimage, and potential stresses at Lake Mensabak

Period	Increased Pilgrimage	Possible Stresses and Changes
Late Preclassic (A.D. 300)	Yes	Ecological change, political collapse[1]
Late Classic (A.D. 800)	No	Ecological change, political collapse[2]
Terminal Classic (A.D. 900)	No	Political and economic restructuring[3]
Late Postclassic (A.D. 1400)	Yes	Socioeconomic change, migrations[4]
Early colonial (A.D. 1600)	Yes	Spanish conquest, migrations, disease[5]
Late nineteenth century	Yes	Extensive logging, conflict, disease[6]
Mid-twentieth century	Yes	Foreign intrusions, tourism[7]

1. Hansen et al. 2008.
2. Demarest et al. 2004. No Classic sites have been identified at Mensabak to date.
3. Demarest et al. 2004. No Terminal Classic sites have been identified at Mensabak to date.
4. Rice and Rice 2009.
5. Vos 1988a.
6. Tozzer 1907.
7. McGee 1990; Palka 2005b.

Pilgrimages did not occur at Lake Mensabak in Classic times since people largely did not live in the area until the Postclassic period (Deeb et al. 2011; Palka and Sánchez Balderas 2012).

Pilgrimages increased at Lake Mensabak again during the social, demographic, and economic changes of the Late Postclassic period (Masson 2000; Rice and Rice 2009). At this time, Maya civilization reorganized after the fall of regional polities, such as Mayapan, and the subsequent disruption of wide-reaching exchange systems. Maya population movements, including migrations to Lake Mensabak, and subsequent conflicts were common in this era. What is significant is the evidence for another severe dry spell in central Chiapas and Tabasco during the Late Postclassic to colonial period transition (Folan and Gunn 2007; Vargas Pacheco 2002). Rivers in Chiapas and Tabasco were at their lowest levels at this time, indicating protracted droughts. Lake Mensabak would have attracted Maya populations for refuge from regional conflicts and drought. The Maya pilgrimages to Mensabak, beginning in the Late Postclassic period, aimed to restore cosmic imbalance, the seasonal rains, protection from spiritual forces, and the health of crops and humans. This dry spell may explain why Late Postclassic to historic period Maya at Mensabak created the Tlaloc (Mensabak) image at the Mensabak cliff shrine

(see fig. 6.29) and the feathered serpent petroglyph on the Tzibana cliff (see fig. 5.8), both of which are related to rain. The return of the rains after the annual dry season was also crucial, and rituals at the shrines were conducted to bring back the rains and normal lake levels. The gods represented on the cliffs were also associated with war, and ceremonies here would have brought success in combat and protection for the community.

The conquest-era Maya also made pilgrimages to sanctuaries at Lake Mensabak, such as the Sak Tat and Mensabak cliff shrines, where they deposited skeletons of adult community members (see fig. 6.32). They placed human burials here to renew soul energies of the community, contain potentially harmful forces from the dead, and facilitate communication with divine essences with their dead relatives as intermediaries. These rites of renewal and protection also occurred during the Spanish conquest and its demographic, economic, and social impacts. Later, the Lacandon Maya made pilgrimages, at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, when loggers entered their territory. The outsiders brought disease, conflict, and trade that disrupted native societies. Missionaries and Maya migrants introduced subsequent economic, social, and demographic changes, and they challenged Lacandon political autonomy and territorial boundaries. These stresses required Lacandon religious specialists to cultivate ties to spiritual forces to address changes in their world and restore balance. Hammond and Bobo (1994) have suggested that the stresses I have outlined contributed to Maya pilgrimages to the ancient Maya ruins of La Milpa. In this case, the Late Postclassic to early historic Maya reset stone stelae in front of monumental architecture and left offerings here. These actions suggest that the Maya attempted to contact ancestors and spiritual essences to act on their behalf during these times of change. The Maya made pilgrimages to the ruins within a period of revitalization and social integration in addition to pronounced economic and religious transformations.

Maya Politics, Pilgrimage, and Territory

Politics, power, and social differentiation are part of Maya pilgrimage, as they are a part of pilgrimage traditions in other parts of the world (Eade and Sallnow 2000). Elites and religious specialists create and manage shrines at ritual landscapes. Through the maintenance of the buildings and elaborate rituals at the shrines, elites signal their commitment to supporting pilgrimage and social cohesion (Kantner and Vaughn 2012). Furthermore, the efforts

of elites are indicative of their central roles in communicating with spiritual forces and maintaining world order for society as a whole. Elite shrine constructions testify to their religious, political, and economic power, in addition to their commitment to create ceremonies for public consumption. In the Maya case, elites constructed and managed pilgrimage shrines at mountains, caves, islands, and cenotes. At Lake Mensabak, elites mustered the labor and resources to build the temples and terraces on Mirador Mountain, which allowed Maya pilgrims to access the sanctuary on the summit as well as shrines along the way. Similar public constructions made by Maya elites can be seen at the edge of cenotes at Chinkultic (see figs. 5.13–5.15) and the entryway terrace and shrine at Naj Tunich Cave.

Through their creation of pilgrimage shrines, Maya elites managed communal rituals and preserved the covenants between people and spiritual forces in order to secure cosmic balance and maintain their communities. As mediators between people and spiritual forces, Maya elites and religious specialists were necessary for the continuation of the collective good. Additionally, segregated temple constructions and elevated platforms at Maya pilgrimage shrines indicate restricted elite activities at pilgrimage sites and thus elite privilege. Maya elites and religious specialists benefited from running successful pilgrimage shrines (Freidel 1981). These shrines attracted large numbers of pilgrims in addition to members of resident populations. Subsequently, elites extracted labor and tribute from people using the shrines. Pilgrim centers and markets at political centers in the Maya region and throughout Mesoamerica were important means by which elites maintained their political power and economic prosperity. For example, Palenque and Chinkultic became Classic Maya regional political, religious, and economic centers because of elite shrines on mountains, in caves, and along bodies of water at the sites.

In contemporary Maya societies, religious specialists organize and undertake pilgrimages to ritual landscapes (McGee 1990; Vogt 1981). The religious specialists are older adult men who have acquired ritual knowledge and high social status in their communities, which enable them to lead ceremonies. Because of sexual roles and division of labor in Maya societies, men are often in charge of religious ceremonies (Molesky-Poz 2006; Vogt 1969). Men also wield political power in their communities, which translates into the control of rituals regarding the well-being of their families and society. Also, pilgrimage rites center around agriculture and hunting, which are largely men's work, and thus they manage the ceremonies. Control over interaction with

spiritual forces for public benefit helps men cement their positions of power in communal political and religious life. Women and children create the offerings, such as ritual foods, which gives them religious importance, but men present the offerings to deities at the shrines (see fig. 6.18). In Maya societies, women are often restricted from entering shrines in ritual landscapes or participating in rites there. Consequently, men's control of pilgrimage and its benefits for family and society help male religious specialists and household heads solidify their status within their communities. Ritual landscapes are also viewed as particularly dangerous for women, perhaps because of their roles in "impure" sexual activity and procreation (Monaghan 2001). For example, Lacandon men from Mensabak state that if women enter a shrine they will become sick or anger resident gods, which will bring illnesses to others or even cause earth tremors.

Additionally, the political and ritual economy of pilgrimage can be addressed through ethnographic and archaeological information from the Maya region. As we have seen, merchants and markets gravitate toward shrines that draw large numbers of devotees (Adams 1983; Kendall 1991; Pérez Chacón 1993; Wells and Nelson 2007), such as Esquipulas and Tila. Local officials help manage the economic activity. Recent investigations at Salinas de los Nueve Cerros demonstrate the connections between Maya pilgrimage and economics over a long period (Schwab et al. 2012). From the Preclassic period to the present Maya people have extracted salt for regional markets, and they visited landscape shrines, especially at the mountains and caves above the salt pans. Maya visitors left offerings, painted handprints, and carved faces on the walls of the caves. At Lake Mensabak, Maya pilgrims procured food, housing, and offerings at local sites during their visits. The costs of maintaining the ritual landscapes and organizing ceremonies were considerable, and the political and economic power obtained by elites for maintaining major pilgrimage shrines at Lake Mensabak, Salinas de los Nueve Cerros, and other sites would have translated into their control of labor and tribute.

For the Late Postclassic period at Lake Mensabak, the economic importance of pilgrimage can be seen in the artifact assemblages. The large percentage of long-distance trade goods points to a vibrant economy (Palka and Sánchez Balderas 2012). First, exotic marine shell and copper bells have been recovered from every domestic context. Second, the Maya obtained their obsidian from sources across Mesoamerica. Compositional analysis (ICP-MS) of the artifacts indicates that 30 percent (51 of 187 pieces) of the Late Postclassic

obsidian came from the source of green obsidian at Pachuca, central Mexico, utilized by the Aztecs. Large amounts of obsidian were also obtained from San Martin Jilotepeque ($n = 73$; 39 percent) and El Chayal ($n = 46$; 25 percent) in highland Guatemala, along with some pieces from the adjacent source of Ixtepeque. A small quantity of obsidian ($n = 5$) came from the Pico de Orizaba source in Veracruz.

People at Mensabak may have acquired Pachuca obsidian while visiting Maya peoples in Tabasco, Campeche, or highland Chiapas (probably Zinacantan), who exchanged goods with Aztec traders. It also seems likely that the Maya from surrounding regions, who had tapped into interregional trade, made their way to Lake Mensabak for pilgrimage and trade. Additionally, Aztec *pochteca* merchants may have arrived at Lake Mensabak for rituals at the shrines, particularly the island shrine on Mirador Mountain that recalled their ancestral place of Aztlan. Aztec merchants traded in other parts of Chiapas and Tabasco (Clark and Lee 2007:129, 132–34), and their presence and influence were strong in the study region (Calnek 1988:9–13) as seen in Nahuatl loan words in Lacandon Mayan (Bruce 1968). To go from the highlands to Tabasco they would have passed through Mensabak. In Postclassic Soconusco, the Maya elites maintained economic ties with the Aztecs, particularly pochteca traders, since a large quantity of obsidian came from Pico de Orizaba in Veracruz and Pachuca, central Mexico (Janine Gasco, personal communication, 2012; Voorhies and Gasco 2004:84–86). At the Postclassic Maya site of Canajaste in eastern Chiapas and at Topoxte Island in Petén, on the other hand, the majority of the obsidian came from Guatemalan sources (Blake 2010; Braswell 2000; Clark and Lee 2007:134), indicating ties to the eastern Maya highlands.

Importantly, material culture at Maya pilgrimage shrines marks community territory, as seen in other cultures (Dillehay 2007; Liffman 2011; Snead 2008). We have seen that the shrines housed spiritual forces associated with Maya communities and that pilgrimages there reinforced ties with ancestral places. The shrines are located in the landscapes surrounding Maya settlements, like at mountaintops and rivers, and they delineate their territory. Temple constructions, rock art, monuments, and offerings at the shrines, in addition to their continuous use by local people, physically signal claims to ancestral lands. Maya elites and religious specialists presided over the maintenance of shrines in the ritual landscape and political territory. Therefore, the Maya retained their ancestral territories through their ritual interaction with the landscape and resident spiritual forces, especially if their ancestors

and their community members' soul energies were found there (McAnany 1995; Molesky-Poz 2006; Pitarch Ramón 1996). The connections between ancient Maya community, territory, and pilgrimage shrines can be seen at Lake Mensabak. For instance, the monumental constructions at the site of Noh K'uh are oriented toward Mirador Mountain. This alignment points to the communal and religious ties that local Maya had to this ancestral mountain, in addition to substantiating their claims to the lands and resources in the region. In historic times, the Lacandon Maya maintained pilgrimage shrines at Yaxchilan and other ruins in the lowland forests. Lacandon rituals at these sites increased during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when explorers, loggers, and chicle tappers entered their territory in greater numbers. The Lacandon Maya effectively marked their ancestral territories by conducting pilgrimages to ritual landscapes and maintaining shrines in the ruins.

Maya Pilgrimage and Material Culture

Through archaeological data, we can discern the origins, regional importance, periodicity, and functions of pilgrimage for past cultures in different parts of the world (Bauer and Stanish 2001; Dillon 1997; McCorriston 2011; Silverman 1994). Comparative studies of pilgrimage to ritual landscapes from the ethnographic record strengthen our reconstructions of past ritual behaviors. Many features and objects associated with Maya pilgrimage can be found in Mesoamerica and in other culture areas:

1. Unusual or prominent geographical features as ritual landscapes with shrines—mountaintops, caves, springs, boulders, ruins, lakes, cliffs, islands, and temples
2. Separation from domestic contexts—no or few living spaces at the landscape shrines (but some settlements may have pilgrimage shrines associated with geographic features, like springs and hills), cleaned spaces, and little domestic debris
3. Differing material remains compared to other religious contexts—concentrations of ceramics, shells, grinding stones, amulets, fragmented items, sacrificial animals and people, and human burials; different material deposition patterns, including exposed human remains, heaps of animal bone, and objects found in unusual places; atypical

constructions, such as shrines, altars, tombs, baths, or sanctuaries near special landscape features and unique building configurations

4. Travel and access to shrines and movement in the ritual landscape—boat landings, ramps, roads, terraces, steps, walkways, elaborate entrances, special flooring, and paths; temporary housing
5. Places for pilgrim gatherings—terraces, platforms, and plazas near shrines
6. Diagnostic pilgrimage material culture, often in high concentrations at shrines—votive offerings, miniature items, pilgrim amulets, incense burners, flasks, tokens, figurines, objects for blessings (stones, shells, bones, potsherds), rock art, megaliths, hand and foot iconography, body imagery, depictions of people traveling or touching, pilgrims' texts, images of gods/oracles/ancestors, ritual objects related to health, death, good harvests, fertility, and wealth
7. Material culture from different regions—distinctive pottery, offerings, amulets, and ornaments
8. Presence of trade and exchange—objects of economic value and exotic goods, often in large quantities
9. Chronological depth—changing ceramic, lithic, and artifact styles; long sequences of absolute dates; periods of more extensive shrine use
10. Evidence of the leaving or taking of objects at the shrine—votive offerings, food offerings, and specific containers for dirt, stones, water, and other sacred substances; scratches, chips, gouges, and graffiti in shrine walls and monuments

A collection of artifacts and cultural elements allows investigators to recognize and interpret pilgrimage shrines; many of these traits, but perhaps not all, can be found at pilgrimage sites. Other variables not focused on in this book include housing for religious specialists, temporary housing for pilgrims, market areas, and special food preparation areas for offerings and pilgrims' meals. While some of these specific material indicators have been noted in pilgrimage sites elsewhere (Silverman 1994; Vikan 2010), they have not been frequently studied in the Maya region and Mesoamerica (but see Brady and Sears 2000; Kubler 1984; Stone 1995). As we have seen, specific material culture and evidence of behaviors can be found at Maya pilgrimage sites. Therefore, archaeology and ethnography are critical for understanding

ritual landscapes and the social practices associated with their development. Architecture, art, and artifacts related to Maya pilgrimage in the Southern Maya Region typify the remains of pilgrimage found throughout Mesoamerica (Broda et al. 2009) and the world (Coleman and Elsner 1995).

Architecture at pilgrimage shrines in ritual landscapes differs from that in human settlements (Adair 1978). Shrine constructions frequently are found outside of settlements at unique landscape features, and they are present in smaller quantities or found by themselves. Additionally, shrine sizes and configurations differ from buildings in settlements. Temples and terraces on mountains are perfect examples of specialized shrine constructions in the Maya area, as are altars and platforms in ceremonial caves and their associated material culture. Tzotzil Maya pilgrimage shrines at hills and caves, for instance, contain altars, enclosed areas, crosses, incense burners, sacrificial chickens, and pottery vessels for offerings (Sheseña Hernández 2009; Vogt 1993). Lacandon Maya shrines have numerous incense burners, incense boards, and musical instruments made from materials such as turtle carapaces and conch shells (Boremanse 1999, 2007). Female figurines from the waters at Lake Mensabak and ceramic vessels depicting rain gods in ceremonial cenotes at Chinkultic, for instance, were deposited during pilgrimage rituals. The figurines may be related to rites for human fertility and childbirth. The rain god vessels were important for ceremonies to control rain and agricultural fertility. Ceremonial architecture at Maya pilgrimage shrines directs people's movements, such as the terraces on Mirador Mountain at Mensabak, plazas and staircases at Chinkultic, and steps and platforms in ritual caves. The movements of people are organized into ritual circuits, or they circumambulate the sanctuaries. People's movements according to the cardinal points mimic the travel of the sun and celestial bodies in the Maya universe, as seen in the pilgrim's way on Mirador Mountain at Mensabak.

Art in ritual landscapes in the Southern Maya Region points to the importance of pilgrimage to significant places, as outlined in chapters 2 and 3. Cliffs, caves, and temple walls contain abundant rock art and graffiti. Designs depict the deities residing in these places, who were contacted by Maya pilgrims, or alternatively the images indicate that worshipers performed rituals here. Paintings showing Lacandon gods on cliffs, along with sculpture at the ruins of Yaxchilan, are excellent examples of art in ritual landscapes. Rock art and graffiti in the Southern Maya Region also show people traveling to and conducting rituals at shrines. Depictions of saints and pilgrims undertaking

pilgrimages and conducting rituals at Catholic shrines are close parallels to Maya iconography (Adair 1978; Coleman and Elsner 1994). Hand- and footprints, which occur at pilgrimage shrines elsewhere (Proser 2010; Vikan 2010), can be seen in rock art on cliffs and on temple and cave walls in the Maya region. Hand- and footprints symbolize the presence of spiritual energies at ritual landscapes or pilgrims arriving and touching the shrines. Maya hieroglyphic texts at shrines indicate that footprints and hand symbols signified arrival, presence, and travel in pilgrimage.

Artifact assemblages from Late Postclassic to historic period Maya sites at Lake Mensabak demonstrate the ceremonial and economic importance of pilgrimage to ritual landscapes. The quantity of copper bells (see fig. 5.20) in these sites is high compared to Postclassic sites in other parts of Chiapas. Blake (2010:229) reports five copper bells in total from Canajaste, located to the south of Mensabak. Voorhies and Gasco (2004:123–24) found four copper bells, probably from west Mexico, in their excavations at several archaeological sites in the Soconusco region of coastal Chiapas. Copper bells have been recovered in large numbers in the ritual cenote at the pilgrimage site of Chichen Itza (Coggins and Shane 1984:106–7, 117). The bells at Mensabak were likely acquired from pilgrims arriving at the lake and then used in music at shrines in the ritual landscape. Musical instruments, including bells, are important in Maya and Mesoamerican pilgrimages (Rodríguez-Shadow and Shadow 2000; Vogt 1969, 1993). Furthermore, the bells may have symbolized the tail rattles of the feathered serpent or the sound of the falling rain this creature brings (Girard 1995:115). The obsidian data from Lake Mensabak discussed previously provide material evidence for long-ranging socioeconomic ties between people from different regions. Obsidian from multiple sources at the lake was perhaps traded at pilgrimage fairs or brought there by Mayas from different regions. The material culture of Maya pilgrimage will help us learn more about ritual landscapes and the functions and meanings of ceremonies at these significant places.

Maya Pilgrimage Culture

The literature on world pilgrimage discusses the structure and functions of these sacred journeys, in addition to essential behaviors involved, ritual places visited by worshipers, and the material culture that characterizes the particular religious, social, and economic practices in pilgrimage (Adair 1978; Broda et al. 2009; Coleman and Elsner 1995; Crumrine and Morinis

1991; McCorriston 2011; Morinis 1992; Proser 2010; Silverman 1994; Stoddard and Morinis 1997; Townsend 1992; Turner and Turner 1978). The goals of pilgrims in ritual landscapes, such as healing and maintaining covenants with deities (McGee 1990; Vogt 1981), have also been widely considered in these works. From the cross-cultural research discussed in this volume, we can make generalizations regarding Maya pilgrimages and why they have been important over a long period. Additionally, the specific cultural parameters and material associations of Maya pilgrimage to ritual landscapes can be placed in a larger Mesoamerican and world perspective. Maya pilgrimages have been carried out for reasons related to personal and religious identity and also economic prosperity, ethnic identity, and safe childbirth, as seen in other parts of the globe. However, Maya pilgrimage has also been conducted for the benefit of society as a whole. Maya pilgrimages are concerned with the welfare and protection of communities, the fertility of the earth, good harvests, and the preservation of the cosmic balance between humans and spiritual essences. They frequently have been undertaken during times of stress or when people need assistance, such as during episodes of drought, disease, planting, and conflict. Maya are obligated to propitiate spiritual forces, who then provide people with what they need, and so the Maya conduct frequent pilgrimages to maintain world order and ensure people's survival. Hence, pilgrimage is just as important to Maya people's everyday life as cooking food, building houses, and planting fields.

Maya and Mesoamerican pilgrimage sites can be found at settlements, such as Cozumel and Cholula, like in other parts of the world, but the majority are located in the ritual landscape. Large numbers of shrines dot the surrounding hills and forests of Maya communities, which contrasts with the smaller number of pilgrimage shrines in other cultures. Maya shrines contain human burials and the souls of the ancestors who have entered the spiritual realms and help maintain world order. Pilgrimage places and their material signatures accentuate the division between lived human space and ritual landscapes. Maya people do not necessarily carry out lengthy journeys during their pilgrimages; they merely visit the homes of the gods in ritual landscapes that are typically outside of human settlements. Travel to these special places, the separation from domestic contexts, and the impacts on the human body and senses structure the liminal experiences of Maya pilgrims.

Significantly, Maya pilgrimages are also structured by politics, social status, and economics. Maya elites, religious specialists, and men organize

pilgrimages and carry them out. In the past, Maya nobles maintained pilgrimage shrines not only to mediate between society and spiritual essences but also to attract followers who provided labor, tribute, and political support. Maya ceremonial centers, especially ones with important ceremonial caves, mountains, sink holes, and springs, have served as pilgrimage destinations and places for economic activities that brought in supporting populations. More recently, Maya men exclusively have carried out pilgrimage to ritual landscapes because they have the requisite ritual knowledge, have been leaders of their communities, and are viewed as ritually purer than women. Pilgrimage sites are also economically important for contemporary Maya: Maya pilgrims trade, hunt, gather plants, and give offerings to spiritual forces for economic success while on ritual journeys. Finally, rituals in pilgrimage shrines reinforce community identity and mark a people's territory.

This study has helped to define Maya pilgrimage through insights from archaeology, ethnohistory, art history, and ethnography in the Southern Maya Region. Through various data sets we have explored Maya pilgrimage over a long time and focused on its resilient features as well as how it has withstood great cultural changes across the trajectory of Maya civilization. Pilgrimage to ritual landscapes has been an integral part of Maya religion and everyday life for over two thousand years, yet its social, political, and material importance is only beginning to emerge.

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PILGRIMAGE TO RITUALLY SIGNIFICANT places is a part of daily life in the Maya world. These journeys involve important social and practical concerns, such as the maintenance of food sources and world order. Frequent pilgrimages to ceremonial hills to pay offerings to spiritual forces for good harvests, for instance, are just as necessary for farming as planting fields. Why has Maya pilgrimage to ritual landscapes prevailed from the distant past, and why are journeys to ritual landscapes important in Maya religion? How can archaeologists recognize Maya pilgrimage, and how does it compare to similar behavior at ritual landscapes around the world? The author addresses these questions and others through cross-cultural comparisons, archaeological data, and ethnographic insights. Palka also discusses the broad importance of Maya ritual landscapes and pilgrimage for native society in Mesoamerica as a whole.

"In this fascinating book, Joel Palka marshals an impressive amount of archaeological, historical, and ethnographic information from all of Mesoamerica to answer why Maya pilgrimage across ritual landscapes has been so important throughout their history. This book is a valuable addition not only to the literature on Mesoamerica, but also to pilgrimage studies worldwide."

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JOEL W. PALKA is an associate professor of anthropology and Latin American and Latino studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago and the author of *Unconquered Lacandon Maya: Ethnohistory and Archaeology of Indigenous Culture Change*.

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: Maya ritual cliff at Lake Mensabak, Chiapas, Mexico, courtesy of Joel W. Palka.

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